

CRISIS COUNSELING: A MODEL FOR MINISTERS

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Doctor of Religion

by

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To My Mother

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CHAPTER I

THE CHALLENGE OF CRISIS MINISTRY

Crisis experiences are common to man. Everyone occasionally finds himself at a crucial moment when it is very important, perhaps even necessary, that he make a decision, solve a problem, fulfill a task, or deal with some significant issue. These are moments of crisis. These are times when action is imperative. And these are times when the guidance and help of a minister or some other qualified and caring person are most needed and welcomed. Fortunately, this kind of help and guidance is usually available because one of the most efficient and worthwhile ways for a minister to use his time in the service of others is to counsel with them during their times of crisis.

Most ministers live with crowded schedules, and in spite of long work weeks they find it very difficult to fulfill the demands that are placed upon them. Frequently this predicament derives from the minister's failure to come to grips with himself as a person, with who he is and with what his responsibilities really are. Without the strength that would come from knowing his own identity, he is reticent to clarify his proper function with his people and so over-loads himself and allows himself to be misused. But apart from

becoming involved with trivia and busy work, the demands of people with legitimate needs are often more than he can respond to helpfully. If he is serving a small church, he usually has many kinds of jobs which need to be done and little help in doing them. On the other hand, the minister of a large church has more staff help and is able to limit himself to fewer kinds of tasks. But he, too, finds it hard to get his work done because so many people have needs that seem to demand his attention.

A minister can face this problem of having more to do than he has time in which to do it either by working more hours or by scheduling his time according to the priorities that are meaningful to him. The first alternative often leads to continued frustration because he still does not get all of the work done and to resentment because he feels overworked and underpaid. But if he clarifies his priorities and schedules his time accordingly, he can fulfill those responsibilities that are rightly his within a reasonable work week and leave other matters either to be taken care of by others or to go undone. The preaching, teaching, and healing ministries are among the most important functions of the minister, and most clergymen would probably choose to give top priority to one or more of these aspects of their work. This is certainly as it should be because the minister is usually the most competent person within the local church in these areas of work.

I. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The focus of concern in this study is on that particular aspect of the healing ministry called pastoral counseling and especially the kind of pastoral counseling which seeks to help people involved in crisis experiences, namely crisis counseling. But what do these and other important terms mean?

Pastoral counseling. This is a form of religious ministry that seeks to contribute to the healing and/or growth of persons by integrating the findings of theology and the behavioral sciences and applying them in human relationships, usually within a one-to-one or small group context. Within the Church this is done from a Christian perspective and with a view toward preparing the way for the possibility of divine-human encounter.¹

Crisis counseling. As it is used in this study, this term refers primarily to the pastoral counseling of persons who are

¹Cf., Edward E. Thornton, Theology and Pastoral Counseling (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 27, and LeRoy Aden, "Pastoral Counseling as Christian Perspective," in Peter Homans (ed.) The Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 167.

experiencing difficulties that are quite beyond their abilities adequately to resolve alone. Crisis counseling, however, is not just a sub-speciality of pastoral counseling. It is a specific kind of general therapy and may be practiced from a religious perspective as in pastoral counseling or from a secular perspective as a part of humanistic psychotherapy. Crisis counseling is based on certain crisis and crisis-intervention theories that are assumed to be valid regardless of whether the counseling is done from a pastoral or a secular perspective.

Crucial situation. A crucial situation has three characteristics: (1) It is a situation that cannot be avoided and which demands decisiveness. (2) It is a situation of momentous importance to the individual(s) involved. (3) It involves an element of ultimate significance.²

Emotionally hazardous situation. This is a condition which is brought about when a change in social forces alters one's relations with others or changes his expectations of himself.³

²Carl Michalson, Faith For Personal Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 3-6.

³Louis Paul, "Crisis Intervention," in Interdenominational Institute for Clergy, The Clergy and People in Crisis (Los Angeles: Mental Health Development Program, May 18, 1965), p. 14.

Crisis. A crisis is an acute disturbance resulting from an emotionally hazardous situation.⁴ Some crises are rather brief disturbances caused by situations that a person cannot adequately cope with alone. These may be termed exceptional situational crises and are the primary concern of the crisis counseling theory set forth in this dissertation. Other crises are relatively longer critical phases in a person's maturational development. These may be termed normal developmental crises and will be given less attention here.

Emotional predicament. This term covers the emotional hazard, the crisis state, and the distressed persons involved.⁵

Health. The terms health, healing, mental health, emotional health, and the like are used frequently in the discussion of psychotherapy. Sometimes these terms can be quite misleading because of their medical connotations. In this discussion, however, connotations based on any narrow medical model are specifically disclaimed. Instead, these terms are used to connote the positive qualities of wholesomeness, rightness, soundness, and well-being

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

that are implied by the fact that words such as health, whole, and holy are derived from the same root. Thus these terms are used in a broad and inclusive sense to refer to the wholesomeness of the person as an integrated totality.

Church. When this term is capitalized in this dissertation, it refers to all of those people who acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord and who are truly united to him. It is not capitalized when it denotes a specific, organized community of persons who profess to be united to Christ as, for example, a local church. Hence, in the symbolic language of the New Testament, the Church is the body of which Christ is the head (Col. 1:18); whereas, a church may be considered a part of that body.

II. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this dissertation is to integrate the theological and psychological concerns of the ministry, including the ministry of both the pastor and the church, as it seeks to serve persons who are in the midst of critical life experiences through the means of crisis counseling. This aim will be carried out, first of all, by a discussion of the challenge of crisis ministry, including some consideration of its relationship to the message and mission

of the Church. Passing attention will be given to several common developmental and situational crises without any attempt to elaborate in depth or to be exhaustive. An effort will be made in chapter two to answer the question, "What do you mean by pastoral when you speak of pastoral counseling?" That is, attention will be given to the issue of the relationship between pastoral counseling and the humanistic forms of psychotherapy. This chapter will concentrate on distinctives and will assume, rather than provide, a basic knowledge of personality theories and the theories and methods of both pastoral counseling and the humanistic psychotherapies.

Some theoretical considerations relevant to crisis counseling will be set forth in the third chapter. The next chapter will deal with the role of the minister as a crisis counselor and will show how crisis counseling theory can be applied to meet many of the crucial needs that are brought to the pastor. Finally, the last chapter will indicate some ways the resources of the church can aid in the healing and growth of persons and in the development of genuine Christian community.

Crisis counseling, the focus of this dissertation, is only one kind of pastoral counseling which, in turn, is only a part of the broader field of pastoral care. While most well-trained pastors should give a high place of priority to working with people in crises,

this is not the only ministry that is worthwhile and, in fact, the pastor who fails to care for his people before they reach a time of crisis will not be in a very good position to help them through their crises. Jesus took time to notice little children at play and to participate with people in festivities such as that at the marriage at Cana in Galilee. The scriptural admonition is not only to weep with those who weep but also to rejoice with those who rejoice. There are certainly opportunities for ministry in the relatively stable everyday lives of people, and often cues are given that point to special needs of which even the person himself may not be aware. As Daniel Day Williams says, "A trivial incident may open the way for the first time to the discovery of oneself and of God."⁶ The sensitive minister will be alert for cues that people need his help, and he will be available to his people both in good times and in times of stress.

Even though times of stress can challenge the religious faith of people, stress and crisis can also make people aware of the mysteries of God. This happens frequently to people who seem to have little or no interest in religion, as well as to those with strong religious inclinations. An example of this is the case of a person

⁶Daniel Day Williams, The Minister and the Care of Souls (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), pp. 26, 27.

who had had good health all of his life when he suddenly found himself in the throes of serious illness. He became bedridden, hospitalized, and relatively helpless. For the first time in years he began to ask religious questions, to think and ponder about the deeper issues of life, about God, destiny, pain, suffering, and the meaning of his life. For this man and others like him the crisis of serious illness may be a blessing as well as a state of weakness, frustration, and agony. But sometimes the blessing remains so only in its potential. Whether it is actualized depends largely upon the person who is sick, though help in the actualization process may come from a word or deed by some caring person or, indeed, from the silence of someone who is really present, i. e., someone whose presence speaks eloquently of his genuine concern. In circumstances such as these an appropriate word from man can be a Word from God to one who desperately needs it.

III. THE RELEVANCE OF CRISIS MINISTRY TO THE MESSAGE OF THE CHURCH

One of the agonies of human experience is brokenness. Men experience brokenness in many ways, chief of which are alienation from their fellows and estrangement from God. Such brokenness involves tremendous anxiety and represents man's most

basic need, the need for reconciliation to God and to other men. It is precisely to this need that the Christian Gospel speaks, for its message is that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (II Cor. 5:19). So the good news that the Church proclaims is that God has acted in Jesus Christ to make it possible for man to be restored to a right relationship to himself and, by implication, to other men. The Church's message is that God offers to men a relationship that overcomes their agonizing brokenness. He not only values all men but also affirms the great worth of individual persons. This is God's great Word to men: "I love you!" This is God's affirmation; this is the Gospel! To the extent that a person grasps this or is grasped by it he is strengthened to respond positively to the command that he love his fellows. Thus the message of the Church is that the brokenness which man experiences can itself be broken and that man can participate in an affirming relationship with God and with other persons.

But how do these truths become real for people who have been deprived of much of the love that they have needed and continue to need? This question thrusts itself at a Church that would declare the Christian message. If the Church takes seriously its own reason for being, it will respond by providing a setting in which people can come to know the forgiveness and love of God. This is done as the

people who make up the Church become agents of God's grace by relating to others in love, accepting one another as persons who are prized by God despite their faults and failures. This acceptance by those within the Christian community helps those who are accepted to accept their own divine acceptance and to accept others in turn.

One problem that arises is that many people experience the world and nearly everyone in it as loveless and threatening. They see little evidence of God's love or of human concern from people around them. How can they possibly take seriously the Church's ideas concerning a God of love and a community of caring people? For better or worse, the Church has no magic way of getting hostile people to believe its message. So what is needed? The Church must start where these people are, realizing, as Edward E. Thornton says, that "health is potential in salvation, and salvation is potential in health."⁷

Historically the Church has been quick to assert the healing power of a saving relationship to God (i.e., a relationship wherein a person is released to develop toward the fulfillment of his positive potential even as he recognizes that the Ultimate One with whom he has to do accepts him without regard to his good works). But the

⁷ Thornton, op. cit., p. 69.

Church has been much less aware that salvation is potentially present in good health.⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks to this issue when he says,

There is a depth of human bondage, of human poverty, of human ignorance, which impedes the merciful coming of Christ.... There is a measure of entanglement in the lie, in guilt, in one's own labour, in one's own work (Ps. 9:16) and in self-love, which makes the coming of grace particularly difficult.⁹

A person may be so mentally disturbed and emotionally distraught that it is nearly impossible for him to respond affirmatively to the Christian message of reconciliation. In light of this it can be asserted that salvation is potential in health. This simply means that a person who is relatively free from physical and psychological incapacitation has the potential of finding meaning and fulfillment in relationship to God and to other people.

The minister's task, when rightly understood, is directed toward the salvation or healing of total persons.¹⁰ It is impossible to distinguish discretely between the theological and behavioral

⁸The assertion that salvation is potential in health is not meant to imply that only a person in good health can have a saving relationship to God. Such an implication would be a serious mistake, as would any insinuation that physical and mental health indicates spiritual health.

⁹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 93.

¹⁰Homans, op. cit., p. 170.

aspects of man. Thornton is right in describing man as a homogenization of spiritual, social, psychic, and physical factors.¹¹

Williams points to this same idea when he sets forth his principle of linkage. He says that every part of man's experience is linked to every other part. So while salvation and therapy cannot be identified, a sharp distinction between them is meaningless.¹² The meaning of this principle of interpenetration in the practice of the physician and minister is elucidated poetically by the words of Kelly Barnett:

Across the patient's bed we face each other; you in your white coat, a stethoscope in your hand; I in my black coat with a prayerbook in my hand. At the beginning we were one, since the beginning we have always been together, unavoidably related, and when you are true to the oath of medicine and I true to the ordination vows, the center of interest has been, is and must always be in the man on the bed, your patient, my parishioner, God's creation. And if we work in unity together, the patient will come to see, to know, to love the Father God who through us, in us, by us, and in s spite of us, remains, the Ultimate One Who '...healeth all our diseases and forgiveth all our iniquities.'¹³

¹¹ Thornton, op. cit., p. 72.

¹² Williams, op. cit., p. 28.

¹³ Kelley Barnett, cited by Richard K. Young and Albert L. Meiburg, Spiritual Therapy (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 163.

IV. THE RELEVANCE OF CRISIS MINISTRY TO THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Closely related to the Church's message is its mission. Indeed, these are so much a part of the same purpose that it is really quite artificial to separate the two. Here it is done only for purposes of emphasis. Reference to the message of the Church points to the Christian kerygma, i. e., the declaration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to the proclamation that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (II Cor. 5:19). The Church's mission is to promote and to help effect among men an increase in the love of God and neighbor. The Christian pastor seeks to assist in carrying out this mission in many ways. He preaches and teaches the Gospel. But often emotional blocks hinder people from receiving and applying the truths he declares. So the minister must work also with factors that affect people's perception of the Gospel. If he is to help them to a greater love of God and neighbor, he must help them deal with their mental and emotional problems. This is a great opportunity because in helping at this level he may share in shaping a person's whole life for the better.

The New Testament testifies vividly to the pastoral approach that Jesus took. Recognizing the love of God and neighbor

as man's greatest responsibility, he geared his ministry to the needs of those with whom he came in contact. After all, starting where people are, focusing on their felt needs is really quite an important part of truly loving one's neighbor. How can a person say he loves his neighbor unless he cares enough about him to find out where he is, what he thinks, feels, and needs? This is important even when one is aware that he would like to lead the person toward a new way of thinking. Søren Kierkegaard writes that "if real success is to attend the effort to bring a man to a definite position, one must first of all take pains to find him where he is and begin there."¹⁴ Even then, real love involves caring for the person because of who he is rather than in a calculated way manipulating him into being something other than himself. That is, loving a person involves loving that person, not loving some idealized image of him. When a minister learns to relate to persons in this way -- when he comes genuinely to appreciate their innate worth as persons and to care for them at the point of their need, he has mastered one of the great lessons of pastoral care. For pastoral care is, after all, nothing more nor less than "communicating the inner meaning of the Gospel to persons at the point of their need."¹⁵

¹⁴ Robert Bretall, A Kierkegaard Anthology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 333.

¹⁵ Carroll A. Wise, The Meaning of Pastoral Care (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 8.

A time of crisis is certainly a point of very intense need. As such, it is really a moment of opportunity for service for the person who is prepared to help those whose situation or problem is so acute that it is virtually beyond their own ability to handle adequately. Thus moments of crisis are moments of opportunity for the minister. Anton T. Boisen, one of the notable pioneers of the modern pastoral care and counseling movement, states, "The great opportunity of the pastor is...with the distressed, with those who are in jeopardy, with those who are passing through periods of acute crisis and mutation."¹⁶ This is the pastor's chance to run interference, to intervene and try to block those forces that would damage or destroy persons. Harry Stack Sullivan says that "for a great majority of our people...the stresses of life distort them to inferior caricatures of what they might have been."¹⁷ The caring minister acts on the assumption that this does not have to be the case. He intervenes to help during times of great stress, sharing his strength and the resources of the Church in the hope that the

¹⁶ Anton T. Boisen, The Exploration of the Inner World (New York: Willett, Clark, 1936), p. 271.

¹⁷ Harry S. Sullivan, Conceptions In Modern Psychiatry (Washington: Wm. A. White Psychiatric Foundation, 1947), p. 27.

person in crisis can emerge from the strain a better person than when the crisis occurred.

The minister's concern is in helping the person, first of all, because he recognizes the inherent value of persons. But as a Christian pastor he also cares for the person as a part of God's creation, and he usually believes with Saint Augustine that no person finds true peace and wholeness who does not find it in God. So as a pastoral counselor he does not come to the counseling situation unaware of his own religious and moral values. And although he refrains from imposing his values on the counselee, they are a part of the counselor and consequently affect his counseling in many ways.¹⁸ For example, the counselor's conception of the "good life well lived" certainly influences the goal toward which much of his counseling moves.

The effect of the minister's religious values on his counseling may be illustrated by the case of a young lady from a

¹⁸This is not to say that good pastoral counseling sinks into narrow moralism. The failure and harmfulness of moralistic advice-giving is obvious enough by now. But moral values are not out of place in the counseling situation; in fact, they are inevitable. Since the counselor brings with him his own value system whether he is aware of it or not, he is much more likely to be able to govern its effects when he is conscious of its potent presence. The good pastoral counselor will avoid forcing his values upon the counselee, but he may feel free to share appropriately what is meaningful and valuable to him when he is sensitive to the counselee's right to differ and still be affirmed.

compulsively church-going family. Ginnie, the teenage daughter of John and Mary Cameron, felt boxed in at home.¹⁹ Her mother showered her with sentimentality, and as a result Ginnie felt smothered and manipulated. Her father was a harsh disciplinarian who restricted her to the kind of friends and activities that fit his conception of what was good for her. Ginnie craved for freedom; something inside of her demanded it! She felt that she would rather be dead than to be cooped up any longer. So although she did not particularly like the minister of the church that she had been forced to attend, she decided to seek his assistance in the hope that he might be willing to help her find a way out of her prison.

Her pastor, the Rev. Edward Hobart, listened very carefully not only to what Ginnie said verbally but also to what she expressed by her mannerisms, the tone and modulation of her voice, and her tears. He listened empathetically and did not reject her even when she talked about how she hated her parents and "their house." Ginnie sensed that he seemed to care, that he seemed to understand. But she wondered if he would be so accepting if she told him what she really dreaded to admit to herself but could not deny, that is, that she hated God, too? After all, was not God responsible for allowing her to be born to John and Mary Cameron??

¹⁹All names in case illustrations are fictitious.

So she tested the depth of Rev. Hobart's concern to see if she could really trust him with her most painful feelings. She told him that sometimes she could not stand their church with all of its hypocrites and that the thought had even crossed her mind that he might be a phoney. Rev. Hobart responded directly to her feelings. He did not rush to the defense either of the church or of himself. Moreover, he seemed to accept her and to like her even though she felt terribly guilty for what she had uttered. But she decided that she must get it all out while she was at it. Maybe telling the minister would relieve the terrible anxiety that was putting pressure on her from within. So she blurted it out. "I sometimes feel that I hate God, too, if there is a God, which I doubt. I even feel it right now, I do hate.... You said in your sermon Sunday that God loves everyone. Well, I don't love God, just to be honest. I hate him for the hell he has put me through at home. I'm sorry but that is just the way I feel, and it's Christian to be truthful, too, isn't it?"

Now without analyzing all of the psychological ramifications of this case, it can be used to show how the religious and moral values of pastoral counselors affect their counseling even though they carefully avoid forcing them on their counselees. Rev. Hobart believed that love for God could add great joy to living and that faith in God could bring Ginnie some of the freedom that she desperately

needed. But he did not gainsay the fact that Ginnie did not have that kind of faith and love at that time. He accepted her where she was. He affirmed that it was all right for her to feel the way she did. At the same time, he refused to agree with her in her indictment of God. He assumed, as a matter of fact, that God was good and was not a tyrant; this assumption was a part of his value system. Being clinically aware, Rev. Hobart knew that much rebellion and hostility against God is really rebellion against parents. So recognizing the cause of Ginnie's troubles to be in her relationship with her parents, who were loyal church members but blundering and needy parents, he moved immediately to get Ginnie's mother and father into counseling as well. He accepted Ginnie's feelings of hatred against God, but he focused on the real core of her crisis and attempted to help her at the point of her primary need. Yet while he did this, he prayerfully hoped that when Ginnie's parental relations had improved she would regain her faith in God and would be capable of greater love of God and other persons than she was before her family problems reached crisis proportions.

This incident illustrates clearly the principle of interpenetration. Religious needs, emotions, and ideas are not divorced from psychological needs and social circumstances. Dealing with a psychological or social problem that has become more than a person

can manage alone may be the minister's finest hour of Christian service. Ernest E. Bruder tells of a patient that he met while ministering in a mental hospital.²⁰ This man had been abandoned by his immediate family when he was a small child. He had been foisted upon relatives and shifted about. His father had coldly turned his back on him when he needed most the strength and security of a loving man. At the age of fifteen the patient had met an old man who, though an atheist himself, had shown the lad the warmth and kindness that he had been deprived of by his father. In light of the rejection by his family and especially by his father that this patient had experienced and in view of the fact that his emotional needs had been met at an important time in his life by a man who professed himself to be an atheist, it was no accident that this young man had become an avowed atheist himself. The friendly old man had helped him when he had been abandoned by his family, i.e., at a point of crisis, and so he was susceptible to the old man's influence. A time of crisis is a time of great opportunity for the Church, but it is so only if the Church is present with people during their crises and ministers effectively to them during these decisive moments of intense need.

²⁰ Ernest E. Bruder, Ministering to Deeply Troubled People (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 82, 87.

V. EXAMPLES OF COMMON CRISES

As has been indicated before, crises may be divided conveniently into two types, normal developmental crises and exceptional situational crises. The essential distinction between the two is that developmental crises are normal, though critical, experiences in the maturational process, whereas situational crises are exceptional in that they result quite unpredictably from unusual circumstances. Developmental crises usually extend over a longer period of time than do situational crises, though this is not always the case. Like most classifications, the developmental/situational typology cannot always be applied in a hard and fast way. Some crises could be considered of either type, or perhaps of one type for one person and of the other for someone else. For instance, the experience of religious conversion may be considered a developmental crisis when it stems from what Oates calls pastoral patience, involving a person's whole life, his encounters with sin and grace, his family context, his vocation, and his relationships with fellow believers.²¹ But a more sudden, dramatic religious conversion, involving radical and immediate changes in a person's life, is

²¹ Wayne E. Oates, The Christian Pastor (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), p. 19.

usually an experience resulting more directly from situational factors and would likely be classified under the category of situational crises.

Although it is not feasible to list all possible human crises, a list of a limited number of each of the two main types may be helpful. Some normal developmental crises are: birth, weaning, toilet training, the oedipal conflict, entering school, adolescence, choosing a vocation, choosing a spouse, leaving home, adjusting to marriage, leaving school, adjusting to post-school life, pregnancy, parenthood, the middle-age crisis, reaching one's vocational summit, losing one's parents, menopause, retirement, death of spouse, death of friends, and eventually one's own death. A list of exceptional situational crises might include the following: the loss of one's job, savings, supporting person, or position of status and respect; an incapacitating accident, illness, or surgical operation; the death of a child; marital infidelity and divorce; mental illness, alcoholism, or drug addiction; a physical handicap; an unwanted and/or out-of-wedlock pregnancy; a move from a situation of security; a natural disaster or a massive social calamity such as war or depression.²² All of these are emotionally

²²Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 159, 160.

hazardous situations and may become crises for the persons involved, depending upon individual needs and coping resources.

In order to note generally how the Church might relate itself meaningfully to significant human experiences such as these, perhaps it would be useful to take a few examples of crisis situations and discuss them briefly.

Some Normal Developmental Crises

Adolescence. One might immediately question whether adolescence is a crisis in the strict sense of the word. Is it not a normal, though turbulent, stage in the process of growing to maturity? Yes, this is quite true. However, crises vary in intensity so that they may be scaled on a continuum ranging from crucial situations of a diverse, diffuse nature to very intense and acute crises which demand immediate and concentrated attention. For most young people adolescence is a time of critical incidents of the diverse, diffuse type, with an occasional incident taking on more intense characteristics. Some young persons, however, experience a building up of pressure and an increase in psychic tension until they reach an acute state of crisis where something has to be done and that right away. This results frequently from the conflict between their demand for freedom and their parents' demand for

control. In cases like this churches very often can make a valuable contribution to the happiness and productiveness of the persons involved by providing them with serious pastoral counseling in the form of short-term family therapy.

There are also certain things that churches can do to help prevent such acute adolescent crises. For instance, a growth group could be provided for parents of adolescents. This would give parents with similar problems a chance to share their ideas and feelings about some of the various experiences that arise in their homes. Furthermore, groups can be provided for young people that deal with the issues that are relevant to their needs. Adolescence is a time of trying to find one's own identity. The young person wants to know who he is vocationally, who his marriage partner might be, and what would be a viable philosophy of life for him. The Church can help him to find answers to these crucial questions by providing counseling and educational programs that focus on his real needs.

Commitment to marriage. Nearly every young person looks forward to finding someone with whom he can share his life in marriage. The Church can provide opportunities for wholesome socialization through its youth programs and for guidance in dating,

courtship, and marriage through its educational programs. But when a young person is about to be married, he needs some special help that goes beyond general preparation.

A minister would do well to have pre-marital counseling with each couple that he unites in marriage. This should be a normal part of their preparation and may well include a discussion of subjects such as finances, sex, children, and relationships with in-laws. But it should not be limited to these as important as they are. The minister should be flexible enough in his counseling to deal with matters that concern the persons who make up this unique couple. He should be especially sensitive to nuances in their manner of relating with each other. He may also encourage them to get involved in some kind of growth group so that they can learn more about each other and become more loving persons whether or not they continue with their marriage plans. Through wise pre-marital counseling the minister may forestall the crisis of a later marriage breakup and by so doing help a young couple to more stable and need satisfying lives.

The need for special help as a young person approaches marriage can be seen in the case of Tony Hensley, a twenty-one year old young man whose marriage proposal was accepted by Alice,

a girl he had known for only about a month.²³ Tony and Alice planned to be married three months from the date of their engagement, and so Alice and her family made elaborate plans for a big church wedding. But as the wedding date approached, Tony became very unsure of his decision to marry Alice so soon after he had met her. He felt a strong urge to talk with Alice about postponing the wedding and wondered if he should call it off altogether. He knew that the wedding announcements had already been mailed, and so he was afraid to suggest postponing the event because that might alienate Alice, her family, and numerous friends. He felt that he had to decide either to cancel the wedding completely and forget Alice or to go ahead and take the chance of marrying her in the hope that he would be doing the right thing.

Alice's pastor apparently considered the couple too mature to need pre-marital counseling, and about the only pre-marital assistance that Tony's minister ever gave young couples was that related directly to the wedding rehearsals. While Alice planned with some confidence for the marriage, Tony's uncertainties mounted until he found himself in a state of crisis. He had to make a decision as soon as possible, but he did not even know what he

²³ All names in case illustrations are fictitious.

wanted to do, to say nothing of what he should do. Fortunately, Tony talked his problem over with his brother, a minister himself, who listened empathetically and reflectively as Tony verbalized his feelings, clarified his alternatives, and decided for himself that he wanted to go ahead with the wedding plans. Tony and Alice have been married for several years now and, aside from the typical problems of adjustment, have had a very happy and fulfilling marriage. But when they look back they can recall two ministers who did not take time to do an adequate job of counseling with them during a time of need, a time which for Tony at least was a time of real crisis.

Retirement. Retirement comes as a great shock to some people, and it may be the greatest shock to persons who have anticipated and planned for it most. One successful educator had a lifetime of teaching behind him and could look back on his life without major regrets. He had enjoyed his teaching and had had a stable and enjoyable family life. Throughout his career he had planned financially for his retirement years and had anticipated with enthusiasm the day when he could set aside his vocational career and spend his last years in relaxation and fishing. Having always enjoyed this sport, he had never had time to do as much of it as he

would have liked. When he thought of retirement, he thought of his reel and rod. Retirement was going to be his heyday.

But when retirement came, it was not the heyday that he had planned. Fishing was a pleasant pastime for a while, but it soon got old. He missed his students, he missed his job, but what he missed most was the sense of meaning and purpose that had come from being a productive member of society. So he decided that he would talk the matter over with his pastor, even though he did not really expect the pastor to be able to do anything very useful for him. He just thought that perhaps telling someone how bored he was, how useless he felt, and how meaningless life had become might help him to feel better. During his first session with the minister, it was suggested that he might consider using his educational background by tutoring some of the culturally deprived children in the city. This sounded like an interesting way to use his abilities, to be of significant service to the community, and to help the children who really needed help most. So he accepted the challenge and got involved in meaningful living again. It did not take a great deal of time and effort on his pastor's part. Within one session of crisis-centered counseling definite movement toward the resolution of this man's retirement crisis had taken place and, with his pastor's support, he was quite capable of handling things from there.

Death. People die in different ways. Some die in their sleep, others in intense pain, some with great dread, and others quite contentedly. But for everyone the prospect of dying is a matter of crucial importance, and for many it becomes a situation of genuine crisis, the last of life's developmental crises. In fact, dying is a matter of such moment that the pastoral care of dying persons is the most urgent of all pastoral demands. A dying person's request for the time and attention of the minister takes precedence over all other pastoral concerns.²⁴ Other matters can wait, but death waits for no one.

Moreover, the pastor's ministry to a dying person is the most intensely personal of all his pastoral functions. To share the depth and intensity of these last moments of a person's life is a pastoral privilege and responsibility not to be taken lightly. The person may wish to counsel with the pastor concerning the state of his relationship with God, the meaning of death, the possibility of life beyond death, or some other urgent matter. He may feel a pressing need to make confession of matters that he has long repressed, so the pastor's confessional ministry at this time may

²⁴Oates, op. cit., p. 39.

be of tremendous importance to the person. If it is at all possible, the pastor should certainly see to it that he has at least a few moments of privacy with the dying person. There may be things the person would like to say that he would be reluctant to mention with others around. Jesus set the example for this kind of permissive pastoral privacy when he sent people out of the room of a person to whom he was ministering.²⁵

When a dying person or his family asks the minister's opinion concerning his chances, the minister should avoid being either evasive or falsely reassuring. At the same time, he should not speak as though he had authority on a condition about which he knows little. It is safer to steer a course somewhere between hopeless prognosis and false reassurance.²⁶ It may often be wise to refer such inquiries to the person's physician. Dr. Frank Adair says, "The dying patient usually knows his condition and at the end is glad to go. This seems to be especially true of those patients who have deep religious convictions."²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 39-42.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

²⁷ Frank Adair, cited by Arnold A. Hutschneker, "Personality Factors in Dying Patients," in Herman Feifel (ed.) The Meaning of Death (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 238.

Oates lists three important principles in the pastoral care of dying persons: (1) close conversation and cooperation between the pastor and family members, (2) close contact between the pastor and the person's physicians, and (3) the opportunity for the pastor, as God's representative to the dying person, to have some time for a private pastoral relationship with the person.²⁸

Some Exceptional Situational Crises

Loss of job. The loss of one's job can trigger a crisis for a person who has several dependents and moderate to heavy financial responsibilities. This was the case with Austin Thomas, the purchaser for a small industrial firm.²⁹ Austin realized that he was having difficulty relating well with his superior, who was a close friend of the company president. In fact, the situation became so tense that he recognized that his superiors were putting him under pressure to quit his job so that they would not have to fire him. Austin decided that he would try to stick it out, and so he refused to quit because he believed he was doing a good job for the company, he had a wife and two children to support, and he was

²⁸Oates, op. cit., pp. 40-42.

²⁹All names in case illustrations are fictitious.

fifty-four years old and afraid to quit lest he be unable to find another good job at his age. The pressures at work continued to increase, but Austin steadfastly refused to quit, maintaining that he was a good worker and so had a right to his job. Instead, he repressed his feelings and developed psychosomatic symptoms including an ulcerous stomach and severe headaches, all the while refusing to express negative feelings toward his superiors. Finally he was given his dismissal papers and told not to report for work the following Monday.

Thus Austin found himself without work, with poor prospects for getting another good job very soon, with heavy financial responsibilities, and in poor health. The loss of his job had thrust him headlong into a crisis situation. How much better off he would have been had some sensitive person, perhaps his pastor, helped him to face the realities of his situation some two months earlier, when the crisis first began to develop. He could have been encouraged to talk about his feelings of being treated unfairly at work and to express the anger he felt toward those who were putting him under such pressure. This catharting not only would have helped to prevent the somatic reaction but also would have cleared his mind of some of its ambivalence toward the situation and the people involved. He would have seen the

handwriting on the wall. Or, if he had not seen it by himself, the minister or caring person could have pointed out gently but firmly the realities of his situation to him. This would have given him a chance to look seriously for another job before he was fired. The possibilities of finding another good job right away would have been greater. Had he succeeded in locating work, the crisis of being torn between no income and heavy financial responsibilities would have been avoided altogether.

An out-of-wedlock pregnancy. It is not an uncommon thing for a minister to be the chief counselor to persons caught in the crisis of pregnancy outside of marriage. Some of the important issues involved in such counseling are related to questions concerning whether the pregnancy should be kept a secret or discussed openly, whether the couple should marry or not, and whether the baby should be kept or released for adoption. But beyond these practical questions there is the need for sensitivity and caring support on the part of the pastor and the Christian community for the immediate persons caught in this crisis as well as for their families.

The value of therapeutic intervention in this kind of crisis is illustrated by one of the counseling experiences of the Rev.

George Bertrand, pastor of a large Baptist church in the western part of the United States. His secretary had scheduled an appointment for him with a sixteen year old girl who called herself Jane Smith. When Jane arrived, she asked Rev. Bertrand whether he would be willing to help her friend, Trissa, who had recently discovered that she was pregnant.³⁰ He said he would be glad to do what he could and asked Jane to have Trissa call for an appointment. A couple of days later Trissa called and set up an appointment for the following day. When Trissa arrived at the pastor's study, the minister discovered that Trissa was the same girl who had first contacted him under the alias of Jane.

Rev. Bertrand asked Trissa the name of her physician. She responded by saying that she did not have one, did not plan to get one, and hoped that the baby would never be born. During the interview the minister noticed a number of signs indicating that the counselee was suicidal. For instance, Trissa said that she would rather be dead than to go through with having the baby and ruining her family's reputation in the community. She said that she had not slept through a whole night for a week and a half but usually awoke about two o'clock in the morning and found it very difficult to get

³⁰ All names in case illustrations are fictitious.

back to sleep. Although she cautiously refused to give any information that would divulge her true identity and persisted in her unwillingness to tell the pastor who her family physician was, she did tell him the name of the young man who had gotten her pregnant.

Soon after the session Rev. Bertrand found the young man's phone number in the directory and called him. The young man responded rather nonchalantly until the minister told him that this was a life or death matter and that, if he did not recognize its seriousness and tell him how he could reach her parents and/or family physician, he might be responsible for the girl's death or mental breakdown. At this point the young man became more cooperative and told the minister how he could reach the girl's parents as well as her physician. Rev. Bertrand then called her parents. They knew about the pregnancy but were ignoring it, as though it might simply go away. As a matter of fact, they were quite indignant that a minister would involve himself in something that they considered none of his business. They indicated that they did not want to be bothered and refused to help the minister get their daughter into a home for unwed mothers where she could get the psychotherapy and physical care that she desperately needed.

Finally, Rev. Bertrand took the matter into his own hands and called the family physician, who showed real concern but did

not know what to do. So the minister told the physician what he had legal authority to do as a medical doctor that he himself could not do as a clergyman. Whereupon the physician began proceedings that eventuated in the girl's admission to a home for unwed mothers in a large city not too far away where she received the medical and psychotherapeutic help she needed. In this particular case the minister felt compelled to intervene in this crisis situation in an unusually aggressive way, but by doing so he very well may have been responsible for saving the girl's life and helping her to a reasonably satisfying future.

Marriage breakup. Much of the minister's counseling time is spent in marriage counseling. Frequently he is consulted after the marriage has reached a state of major crisis. At other times he is involved in a counseling relationship that seems to make little progress over a long period of time. Occasionally the counseling itself may bring an ailing marriage to the point of creative crisis. This happened in the case of Tom and Donna Friedlander.³¹

This couple went to a pastoral counseling center about a year ago complaining of a mutually unsatisfying marriage. After

³¹All names in case illustrations are fictitious.

about two sessions Tom decided that counseling was not for him. But Donna continued faithfully in group counseling for about a year. She made slow but steady progress in gaining the strength she needed to face life realistically and to do something about her situation. Eventually she decided to tell Tom that either he would have to do something constructive to improve their marriage such as get into some kind of counseling himself or she was going to leave him. It took a great deal of courage to come to this point, and she did it only with the encouragement and support of her therapy group.

At this stage Donna's marriage problem really took on crisis characteristics. Because of her needs and her children's needs for a happier home life, she could not afford to continue with things as they were. But she had not finished high school and was afraid that if she left Tom she would not be able to support the children. The counselor helped her to see the possibility of getting welfare assistance to support herself and the children while she was getting job training for future employment. The group stood behind her as a tower of strength and support. It was with this kind of help that she confronted Tom with her pain and with her definite decision to take specific action unless he displayed a serious willingness to get help with his part of their marriage. When Tom felt the impact

of her decision, he got into counseling with her and they began serious work together toward the improvement of their marriage.

The Church made a valuable contribution to the lives of this couple and their children by providing pastoral counseling that stimulated positive change. But what could the Church have done had this couple decided to break up the marriage contract? What is the Church's responsibility when, with or without counseling, estranged marriage partners choose divorce? Oates lists six responsibilities that the Church has in its pastoral care of persons who may make such a decision. First, it should help persons toward deep commitment, determination, and the capability for lasting relationships. Secondly, the Church should provide preparation for marriage through education and counseling and should give special attention to the needs of couples in their first three years of marriage. Next, it should provide opportunities for fellowship for divorced persons who wish to remain divorced. It should also involve itself in the rehabilitation of divorced and remarried couples. Fifth, the Church should seek ways to discover potential divorce before it reaches a point of no return, as well as find ways to confront persons who turn to divorce for a second time with the need for repentance and professional therapy. Finally, the

Church should support legislation that contributes to the responsible solution of marriage problems.³²

Physical illness. Almost any kind of serious physical illness can develop into a crisis for the person involved. Sometimes physical illnesses are the direct result of emotional tensions and anxieties. Competent and compassionate pastoral care of persons who are experiencing unusual emotional tension or anxiety can often prevent the onslaught of physical illness. Once illness has struck, the sick person has a greater than average need for pastoral care, lest his illness develop into a real crisis for him. Indeed, special attention should be given to the physically ill because sometimes physical illness may be the prelude to a psychotic break.³³

An illness separates a person from his former life. He must accept himself as a sick person, perhaps even a hospitalized patient. The sick person's inner world may be characterized by preoccupation with the interruption in his normal routine, his

³²Oates, op. cit., pp. 26, 27.

³³Ibid., p. 27.

interrupted sex life, homesickness, old bereavements, old alienations, and old emotional deprivations.³⁴ He may be caught up in a vicious cycle of pain, fear, panic, tension, and more pain.³⁵ He may even be burdened by a fear of death to the extent that his finitude anxiety burns up vital energy that he needs in order to recuperate.

These are some of the pressures on the person who is physically ill. It is because of pressures such as these that illness can become a time of crisis for sick persons and their families. A minister's pastoral care can be directed toward these points of tension in order to minimize the likelihood of crisis. Or if illness has already thrust a sick person into a state of crisis, the pastoral counselor can focus on these areas of tension and anxiety and by so doing release the person from unnecessary pain and perhaps hasten his recovery.

Clergymen frequently meet crises such as those mentioned above as they seek to serve persons who need their help. But what help can ministers offer to persons who are involved in such difficult crises? One answer to this question is that adequately

³⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

trained ministers can provide competent pastoral counseling. But this answer raises other questions. What is pastoral counseling and what is its relationship to other kinds of therapeutic counseling? These questions and the issues they raise are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

COUNSELING FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

I. THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF PERSONAL PROBLEMS

There are various ways of viewing the problems that are brought to counselors. They may be seen as primarily mental, medical, or social problems or as problems that call for a simple analysis plus a parent-like figure who insists that the counselee wake up and start acting responsibly. None of these stances should be disparaged totally and, indeed, each of them may play an important part in the total drama of a counselee's struggle. Nevertheless, the pastoral counselor's basic guiding principle is that, whatever may be the physiological, psychological, or sociological implications of the person's problem, in the final analysis his struggle is essentially a spiritual struggle. So, the pastoral counselor assumes that the essence of the struggle in a crisis is not first and foremost in the encounter between the pastor and the counselee or between the doctor and the patient. Rather, the essence of the struggle is in the encounter between God and the

person, between Creator and creature.¹ The basic struggle is in this relationship. This is the point of agony; here is where the hurt is. But this is not only the locus of the agonizing, it is also the point where something is struggling to be born. It is the point of pain, but it is also the point of possibility.

A word of hope may come from either the pastor or the physician. But the final word of hope and healing must come from God. To use Dietrich Bonhoeffer's terms, the penultimate word, i.e., anything that prepares the way for God to meet man, may be given by anyone. But the ultimate Word is God's. So every agonizing problem is, in the last analysis, a religious problem fraught with spiritual relevance. Bonhoeffer illustrates this by saying,

Let us ask why it is that precisely in thoroughly grave situations, for instance when I am with someone who has suffered a bereavement, I often decide to adopt a 'penultimate' attitude...remaining silent as a sign that I share in the bereaved man's helplessness in the face of such a grievous event, and not speaking the Biblical words of comfort which are, in fact, known to me and available to me. Why am I often unable to open my mouth, when I ought to give expression to the ultimate? And why, instead, do I decide on an expression of thoroughly penultimate human solidarity? Is it

¹ Edward E. Thornton, Theology and Pastoral Counseling (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 33f.

from mistrust of the power of the ultimate word? Is it from fear of men? Or is there some good positive reason for such an attitude, namely, that my knowledge of the word, my having it at my finger-tips, in other words my being, so to speak, spiritually master of the situation, bears only the appearance of the ultimate, but is in reality itself something entirely penultimate? Does one not in some cases, by remaining deliberately in the penultimate, perhaps point all the more genuinely to the ultimate, which God will speak in His own time.... Does not this mean that, over and over again, the penultimate will be what commends itself precisely for the sake of the ultimate, and that it will have to be done not with a heavy conscience but with a clear one? This question... embraces the whole domain of Christian social life, and especially the whole range of Christian pastoral activity.²

The pastoral counselor views personal problems as being essentially religious at their core, whatever their trappings may be. This does not mean that apparently non-religious issues are to be overlooked nor does it mean that the pastoral counselor insists that all issues, be they theological, ethical, psychological, or whatever, must be discussed using traditional theological language. He knows that, while this kind of language sometimes may be powerfully effective, it may also be entirely inappropriate and quite harmful. Being aware that some people react very negatively to it while others hide from the realities of their problems in its warmth,

²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 84, 85.

the pastoral counselor seeks to use theological language only when such usage is appropriate and then only with great sensitivity and precision.

What the statement that personal problems are religious at their core does mean, however, is that they involve ultimate religious questions which must be dealt with if human life is to be fulfilling.³ The pastoral counselor finds that in counseling with deeply troubled people or with people caught in crises, questions concerning the meaning of life, death, suffering, and existence may arise at any time. These are deeply religious questions. So the idea of God as a relevant factor in the healing of people with personal problems is not a side issue. Indeed, it is the central fact toward which all other issues tend.⁴

Once a counselor has grasped something of the despair in the mind of a person who has been emotionally deprived as a child, pressed with nearly unbearable hardships for years, racked with several recent sequential failures, and now caught in a complex web of unhappy choices involving another of life's emotionally

³Daniel Day Williams, The Minister and the Care of Souls (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 60.

⁴Ibid., p. 61.

hazardous and crucial situations, he sees easily the relevance of theological concepts such as sacrifice, sin, God, apocalypse, eschaton, faith, and hope. For example, in such a situation the troubled person's degree of hope may be the pastoral counselor's most accurate indicator of the person's potential for surmounting his present crisis. As Wayne E. Oates says, "The degree of hope is to the pastoral counselor what the body temperature is to the physician."⁵ Hope is one indication pointing toward mental wholeness, and the lack of hope is basic to the meaning of mental illnesses.⁶ Yet hope is a religious impulse. In fact, William Lynch indicates that hope is perhaps the most basic of all religious impulses.⁷

Pastoral counselors are not the only psychotherapists who recognize the religious component in personal problems. Carl G. Jung, one of the great pioneers of psychiatry, says,

Among all my patients in the second half of life--that is to say, over thirty-five--there has not been one

⁵ Wayne E. Oates, Protestant Pastoral Counseling (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 230.

⁶ Peter Homans, "Toward a Psychology of Religion: By Way of Freud and Tillich," in his, The Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 76f.

⁷ William Lynch, cited by ibid.

whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that everyone of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook. This of course has nothing whatever to do with a particular creed or membership of a church.⁸

Erich Fromm, though far from recommending a Christian perspective, at least acknowledges man's religious craving. He says, "There is no one without a religious need, a need to have a frame of orientation and an object of devotion."⁹ Viktor E. Frankl, noted Viennese psychiatrist and leading proponent of logotherapy or existential analysis, asserts the tremendous value of a religious view of life or of some meaningful system of values. Having spent three grim years experiencing the horrors of Nazi prisons, Frankl said, "Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost."¹⁰

⁸C. G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 264.

⁹Erich Fromm, Man for Himself (New York: Rinehart, 1947), p. 25.

¹⁰Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963), p. 121.

II. SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PASTORAL COUNSELING AND THE HUMANISTIC PSYCHOTHERAPIES

To say that some psychiatrists and psychologists acknowledge man's religious need is to make a rather general statement. It is not meant to imply that those who recognize this need are few or to deny that there are those who see religion as only a part of man's problem and not a part of the solution. By the same token, it does not imply that those who recognize man's religious need consider the Christian faith a good answer to that need. Some do and some do not. For instance, Erich Fromm emphasizes man's religious need but prefers a non-theistic, humanistic philosophy as the preferred means of fulfilling that need.

This matter of whether the Christian faith or some kind of humanistic philosophy offers the more adequate perspective for counseling and for human living leads directly to one of the crucial questions of this chapter. What is the difference between pastoral counseling and other forms of psychotherapy? This question cannot be answered simply for it is very hard, if not impossible, to draw a clear line of demarcation between pastoral counseling and other forms of counseling. There is certainly a great deal of overlapping in terms of the means and ends of counseling. Moreover, what can

be said generally about pastoral counseling and other forms of psychotherapy cannot necessarily be pressed in every case. That is, for every difference that may usually be noted, there are exceptions in the practice of individual counselors or perhaps even in whole schools of counseling. With that word of caution in mind several differences or differences of emphasis can be observed.

First, pastoral counseling differs from most other modern psychotherapies in terms of initial assumptions or basic philosophical presuppositions. Pastoral counseling is counseling from a Christian perspective.¹¹ Other psychotherapies also start with initial assumptions or with a basic faith. But their philosophical basis is usually a combination of religious humanism, reductive materialism, secular liberalism, and scientism.¹² While Christian pastoral counselors accept and utilize much of the practical wisdom of the other modern psychotherapies, they reject this humanistic and naturalistic philosophy. Pastoral counselors

¹¹This statement is not meant to imply that pastoral counseling must always be from a Christian perspective. On the contrary, it may be from the religious perspective of a Jew, Muslim, or some other religious person. But for purposes of specificity, clarity, and force, pastoral counseling is dealt with in this dissertation from a Christian perspective, since it is written by a Christian and primarily for persons of this particular religious faith.

¹²Albert C. Outler, Psychotherapy and the Christian Message (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), p. 43.

insist, and rightly so, that the philosophical pronouncements of modern psychiatrists and psychologists do not have the same authority as their clinical observations.¹³ Indeed, what a psychiatrist might say about the reality and nature of God, for instance, is neither more nor less significant than what might be said by a biologist or a farmer. Pastoral counselors are convinced that when the basic faith of the humanistic psychotherapies is compared to the Christian faith the latter will be seen to be at least as acceptable and meaningful as the former and even more profound.¹⁴

Second, pastoral counseling differs from the humanistic psychotherapies in the context in which it is practiced. Humanistic therapists usually work either in private practice or in institutions that serve their clients only during times of perplexity or illness. They do not have a vital relationship to their clients either before or after therapy. Pastoral counselors, on the other hand, do their work as Christian ministers. If they are pastors of a church, they normally have an important relationship to their counselees both before and after counseling. But even if they are serving in a mental health center, hospital, prison, college, or some other kind

¹³ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 137.

of counseling center, they are usually identified as ministers of the Church. And to the extent that they are functioning as Christian ministers, they are a part of the Church's total ministry to the persons who come to them for counseling. In this sense even these pastoral counselors have a relationship through the Church to their counselees both before and after counseling.

It could even be said that some identification with the Church is part and parcel of what it means to be a pastoral counselor. Christian pastoral counseling is by its very nature a part of the Church. A part of the uniqueness of pastoral counseling lies in the fact that it is done within the context of the Christian community and that it has the heritage and resources of this community with which to work in behalf of persons who need help.

Another of the differences between the humanistic psychotherapies and pastoral counseling is associated with the way in which they value human persons. The humanistic psychotherapies, of course, give man top priority and value him very highly indeed. But pastoral counseling is in a position to value man in a way that is even more meaningful. While it acknowledges man's sinfulness, it also assumes the reality of God and affirms that man is made in

God's image, valued in an ultimate way, and even loved perfectly by God himself.¹⁵

Fourth, pastoral counseling is concerned with ultimate issues based on theology as well as proximate issues based on the behavioral sciences. The humanistic psychotherapies are concerned with proximate issues based on the scientific disciplines and not with ultimate issues based on theology.¹⁶ This is intended as a statement of the interests of these different approaches and not as a value judgment on either. The purposes of the humanistic psychotherapies are scientific and not sacramental, while the purposes of pastoral counseling include both scientific and sacramental concerns.¹⁷ The scientific concerns of pastoral counseling revolve around its participation in the behavioral science field and in its clinical concern for people. These concerns are shared with the other therapeutic approaches. But in addition to these, pastoral counseling has sacramental concerns that go beyond the desire to meet psychological needs only. Pastoral counseling is concerned for the spiritual healing and growth of persons and for the meeting

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 191.

¹⁶ Thornton, op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁷ Ibid.

of their religious needs as well. In short, pastoral counseling considers Christian faith as one of its main concerns; whereas, other psychotherapies either entirely ignore Christian faith or make it a secondary concern only.¹⁸

Closely connected with this difference is another feature that distinguishes pastoral counseling from most modern humanistic psychotherapies. This is the recognition by pastoral counseling of man's need for depth regeneration. The humanistic therapies are directed primarily toward bringing about a cure for the person. Pastoral counseling insists that healing is only a beginning and must become instrumental to more significant growth and development.¹⁹

Another difference is the way each approach identifies the principal means of healing and human maturation. The humanistic psychotherapists trust in the healing action of nature, in man's inherent thrust toward health. Pastoral counselors also recognize and value highly this healing force in nature. But they see this from a theistic perspective and understand that God is behind these

¹⁸ Homans, op. cit., p. 171.

¹⁹ Outler, op. cit., p. 192.

healing and growth-producing forces.²⁰ Consequently, they give praise to God rather than to man for what is accomplished.

Another distinguishing feature of pastoral counseling is its confidence in the power of God to effect human salvation. The humanistic psychotherapies base their hopes for man on what he can do for himself if he is given the right conditions. Christians are also concerned with the betterment of human life through positive social action aimed at improving the squalid conditions under which some people live. But their confidence in the actualization of human possibilities is based, not so much on what man can do for himself as on what God has already done for man through the victory over evil won by Jesus the Christ.²¹

There may also be a difference in the way pastoral counselors and other psychotherapists view the possibilities for the organization of society toward a better future for mankind. Humanistic psychotherapists see the future as something that can be determined by decisive foresight and planning. They maintain an optimism based on man's ability to foresee and plan. Christian pastoral counselors hope for the best possible future, and they see

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 192f.

²¹ Ibid., p. 194.

great value in trying to plan intelligently for it. But they are often more aware than are the humanists that there are blindspots that hamper human foresight and planning.²² So their hope for the future is not based on human effort alone but also on the trustworthy character of God. Their recognition of man's weaknesses and of his potential for evil becomes a part of their foresight and helps them in planning and working toward a better tomorrow. At the same time, they share the Christian's faith that, however confused things may seem and whatever catastrophe may result from human finitude or sin, the future is God's and he will make out of it what pleases him and that will be good.

One of the most important differences between pastoral counseling and the humanistic psychotherapies is in the goal toward which they seek to move the counselee or, to put it another way, in their model for the ideal of life. Generally speaking, most humanistic psychotherapists function under the medical model of health as it is somewhat narrowly defined by the medical profession. They attempt to overcome the suffering of mental illness and to foster what they understand to be mental health. Pastoral counselors, when they have grasped their own unique place in the

²² Ibid., p. 193.

service of others, function according to the concept of health as it is defined more broadly by the Christian ministry. This broader meaning of health, so appropriate for the clergy, and for other counseling professions for that matter, refers to health for the whole man, including spiritual as well as physical and mental health.²³ Pastoral counseling seeks to reduce the suffering which is caused by a loss of meaning in the face of illness or some other crisis. One might say that the humanistic psychotherapies seek to promote health, medically defined. While pastoral counseling does not overlook the value of this objective, it seeks also to inspire hope, theologically defined.²⁴ The pastoral counselor realizes that the ideal of life can never be the perfectly adjusted self. There are some things to which Christian men must never become adjusted. The Christian's search is not for immunity from pain; it is not for freedom from struggle nor for a life without risks. So the pastoral counselor's goal must be to enable persons to see that, whatever pain may have to be suffered, the whole of life, including its dark side, can be made to foster growth in human richness

²³ Elihu S. Howland, "The Unique Contribution of the Clergyman to Health," Journal of Pastoral Care, XXI (June 1967), 91.

²⁴ Thornton, op. cit., pp. 19f.

and fulfillment.²⁵ In a word, the pastoral counselor is concerned first of all with the goal of spiritual growth in the midst of crises and secondly with the goal of mental or physical health or with some other solution to the problems of persons.²⁶ The humanistic psychotherapists, on the other hand, set mental health, as they understand it, as their chief goal. Other goals, if they exist at all, are only secondary.

Finally, the humanistic psychotherapies differ from pastoral care and counseling in terms of the way they view persons who appear to be completely hopeless. When human efforts fail to offer the promise of help for these very deeply disturbed persons, the humanistic psychotherapists have nothing more to offer except to turn them over to others for custodial care. But the Christian minister does have more to offer such persons. Although he too may turn them over to others for custodial care, he can offer them a continuing pastoral relationship that affirms in faith that those things that are impossible to man are possible to God.²⁷

²⁵ Williams, op. cit., p. 26.

²⁶ Thornton, op. cit., pp. 19f.

²⁷ Peder Olsen, Pastoral Care and Psychotherapy (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), p. 43.

III. SOME DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE HUMANISTIC PSYCHOTHERAPIES

As has been indicated before, it is very hard to draw a clear line between pastoral counseling and other psychotherapies because of the extent to which they overlap and interpenetrate. Likewise, it is difficult to speak about the distinctive contributions of these approaches without running into the same problem. For example, one of the principles in crisis counseling is that the counselor and counselee must ask in which direction the counselee is going, as well as what caused him to be like he is. One might well say that this principle is one of the contributions of the humanistic psychotherapies. It has certainly been given tremendous impetus by the modern psychotherapeutic movement, especially in recent years. But this matter of encouraging persons to examine the direction in which they are tending has long been practiced by the Church.²⁸ So is this principle a contribution of the Church or of modern humanistic psychotherapy? It is difficult to say because both of these movements are a part of a complex culture, and they affect and are affected by each other. Perhaps the best that can be

²⁸ H. Flanders Dunbar, "Medicine, Religion, and the Infirmities of Mankind," Mental Hygiene, XVIII (January, 1934), 18.

done practically in many cases is to point up the distinctive emphases of these approaches. In any case, it is important to remember that, while some contributions are unique to either pastoral counseling or to the humanistic psychotherapies, others are emphasized by the one more than by the other even though they may not be the peculiar property of either.

Albert C. Outler has separated out several distinctive contributions of the humanistic psychotherapies.²⁹ He sees these as practical psychotherapeutic principles of wisdom and considers them to be relevant to a Christian approach to psychotherapy. These principles are noted and discussed briefly below.

1. The humanistic psychotherapies place a great deal of emphasis on respect for persons. The way this respect works itself out in human relations varies with the personalities of the individuals involved. Of course, ministers have long stressed respect for persons, but in practice they, along with persons in every profession, have frequently allowed their own needs to interfere with their affirmation of other persons. Modern psychotherapy has made clear the dynamics of this discrepancy between precept and practice, and thus has contributed to the possibility of men respecting one another in deed and not in word only.

²⁹Outler, op. cit., pp. 22-37.

2. Modern psychotherapy insists that man is a part of nature and that the psychological and biological factors within man cannot be separated. These factors interpenetrate. A person's psychological condition may affect him physically, and biological factors may affect him psychologically. This affirmation of the totality of human being is a correction of ancient Hellenistic and Gnostic conceptions of man which split him into body and spirit.

3. Abnormal behavior is not meaningless and should not be dismissed as merely weird and insane. There are patterns of defending and revealing the self behind neurotic behavior. If therapeutic persons can relate with disturbed persons in a way that will free the disturbed persons to be themselves, healing can take place. The modern psychotherapies have shown that it is possible to decode neurotic thoughts and actions in a way that helps the disturbed person to gain needed therapeutic insight.

4. The psychotherapist's primary function in the therapeutic process is really to listen. This is certainly one of the most important principles of any psychotherapy. It does not mean simply to listen to the counselee's words. It means really to hear what the counselee is saying also with his attitudes, voice tonation, gestures, and other body movements. This kind of listening demands that the therapist be really with the person as he re-experiences life's experiences.

5. Modern psychotherapies have shown that man grows to maturity through a process that involves gradual psychodynamic development. Sigmund Freud traces man's development through oral, anal, and phallic phases to genital maturity. Erik H. Erikson describes eight stages through which a person goes in order to develop full maturity. Other humanistic psychotherapists have different systems for describing man's process of development. But the significant point here is that modern psychotherapists have studied the process of man's psychological development and growth and have applied the knowledge gained in this research toward good ends in the healing and help of persons.

6. Moralism cannot produce true maturity. Moralistic injunction and judgmental censorship by parents, ministers, or psychotherapists are unfortunate and self-defeating; indeed, such moralistic pressures tend to be counterproductive and do not produce true morality or mature and responsible ethics. Interestingly enough, the modern psychotherapies have reminded, and maybe even retaught, the Christian Church this truth which Jesus himself taught nearly two thousand years ago when he rejected the moralism of his day in favor of a morality that emerges as a real part of the human self in relation to God.

7. Much of the thought and feeling that passes as religious is not genuinely religious at all but instead is projective and delusional. For instance, some people project onto God the hostility that in reality is within themselves. Then they assume that God is quick to judge and to punish them for everything that they do which they perceive to be sinful. These persons harbor neurotic guilt for breaching any trivial point of their contrived canon of ethics.

8. The modern humanistic psychotherapies have shown that much psychic energy can be burned up in the competition between thrusts and controls in the unconscious. This explains why people usually live far below their potential levels for creative and productive living. The energy that is burned up in repression, control, guilt, anxiety, etc., is not available to be used in other ways.

9. The humanistic psychotherapies stress the tremendous power of love to develop healthy persons and to bring to health those who have been deprived of love. While describing love in diverse ways, modern psychotherapists have emphasized the value of this element in the relationship of parents and children, teachers and pupils, therapists and clients, and all other human relationships. The quality of love in a relationship gauges the quality of the relationship. The degree and quality of love among a community of persons such as a church is an indicator of the health of that

community qua community. The kind of power attributed to love by the humanistic psychotherapies challenges the Christian Church, which has always been a strong advocate of love of God, neighbor, and self, to examine itself for characteristics that might hamper love among persons and to explore new ways of helping persons to release their potential to love.

IV. SOME DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS OF PASTORAL COUNSELING

The pastoral counselor comes to his task as a minister. As a Christian minister he offers to his counselees something that is unique and which is not generally available in counseling relationships with the humanistic psychotherapists. Unfortunately, many ministers are prone to underevaluate their worth as pastors to deeply troubled people. This tends to make them less effective than they could be in their counseling relationships.³⁰

As long as a minister limits himself to the psychiatrist's medical model for his understanding of psychological disturbances and for the method and content of his counseling, he will be far less effective in his therapeutic relationships than he could be. That is, the minister who, without special training in medicine, tries to

³⁰ Carroll A. Wise, The Meaning of Pastoral Care (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 12.

function like a psychiatrist is going to do a poor job, even as the psychiatrist without special training in religion would do a poor job in the work that is distinctively pastoral. This is not to say that these fields are completely separate; there is certainly a great deal of overlap. What it does say is that the psychiatrist has something special to contribute where people's problems can be dealt with best through a medically oriented approach and that the Christian minister has something special to offer people whose problems relate to religious and philosophical issues. The therapy of people with correctable constitutional deficiencies, for example, or for persons who need shock or drug treatments calls for a psychiatrist skilled in medical therapies. But the work with these patients' families that involves grappling with the meaning of all of this suffering certainly calls for the ministry of a competent and caring clergyman.

Interestingly enough, nearly every really important event or idea in a person's life tends, at least among religious persons, to get some kind of theological interpretation.³¹ The minister is the one professional person who is trained to help evaluate these incidents and ideas in terms of their religious significance. He is

³¹Oates, op. cit., p. 226.

especially qualified to consider with the person what they might mean ultimately to him as a person in relationship to God. A pastoral counselor who has training in both religion and the psychological disciplines is in a very good position to help persons who are emotionally disturbed as a result of their inability to integrate many of these 'incidents' of their lives into a meaningful whole. One of his distinctive contributions to such persons is that he meets them as one who has found in the Christian faith an adequate philosophy of life, one that helps him to integrate the 'incidents' in his life and sustains him through the confusion of times when integration is apparently not forthcoming. In short, the distinguishing orientation of the Christian pastoral counselor is that he counsels from a Christian perspective.³²

As a Christian minister the pastoral counselor comes to the counseling situation as a representative of both God and the Church. Presumably he has been vested by both with the authority to exercise the office of a Christian minister. While his identification with God and the Church may stimulate some sticky problems at times and, therefore, must be handled with discretion, the authority that he carries because of this identification will also

³² LeRoy Aden, "Pastoral Counseling as Christian Perspective," in Homans, op. cit., p. 175.

enable him to serve some people who could not be helped appreciably in a reasonable time by other psychotherapists. The pastoral counselor's identification as a servant of God will lend religious authority to his efforts to release persons from neurotic religious bondage and confusion.

If the pastoral counselor also serves a parish, he has an entree into counseling situations that are not available to any other kind of counselor. He is even in a position to initiate the establishment of a counseling relationship himself. If he exercises this privilege, however, he should do it in a way that will stimulate the parishioner's own desire to begin counseling.³³ This is one of the unique opportunities which a Christian minister has as a personal counselor. It allows him to intervene on behalf of persons before their situation reaches the point of no return or to help persons who for various reasons would never seek out a counselor.

Much that is distinctive about pastoral counselors derives from their Christian faith and their training in the theological disciplines. Most other psychotherapies aim at bringing men to an understanding, acceptance, and affirmation of themselves and hope

³³Oates, op. cit., pp. 154, 155.

for little, if anything, beyond this goal.³⁴ Certainly this is a high and noble goal, the attainment of which to any significant extent is no mean achievement. But Christian pastoral counselors are aware of a level beyond this which still needs to be traversed by persons if their deeper needs are to be met fully. This deeper level involves a coming to grips with the meaning and purpose of their lives. It requires more than a finding of oneself; it calls for a finding of oneself in relationship to the divine. As Paul Tillich says, "Psychotherapy can liberate from a special difficulty, religion shows to him who is liberated and has to decide about the meaning and aim of his existence a final way."³⁵

Actually, pastoral counselors contend that it is quite impossible to know oneself adequately without some self-understanding relative to one's origin and destiny. If this be true, then the kind of counselor with which one seeks self-understanding may make a great deal of difference in the adequacy of the understanding he gains.³⁶ Questions that have to do with the whence, why, and

³⁴Outler, op. cit., p. 141.

³⁵Paul Tillich, "Morals and Morality from the Point of View of the Ethicist," in Iago Galdston (ed.) Ministry and Medicine in Human Relations (New York: International Universities Press, 1955), p. 137.

³⁶Williams, op. cit., p. 64.

whether or life are religious questions, and one of the distinctive contributions of pastoral counseling is that it understands the importance of these questions and is capable of helping persons in their search for adequate answers to them. A person who enters counseling, searching for a reason, a meaning, a purpose in life, deserves a counselor who sees meaning and purpose in life himself.

The pastoral counselor is under no illusion that he has all of the answers to the riddles of life or to the apparent lack of meaning in much of it. If he is intelligent, he is aware that all of the answers are not yet available. Much of life is shrouded with mystery. An awareness of this fact is essential on many occasions to a capacity for effective ministry at a deep level. This awareness of mystery, however, impels the pastoral counselor all the more to give attention to helping persons to a meaningful relationship of trust in God. He recognizes that, amid the frustrations and confusions of living, troubled persons need to find the meaning of their lives in relationship to God. They need to apprehend that they have been created by God to know, love, and serve him and one another.³⁷ This awareness of the importance of a wholesome

³⁷ John B. Coburn, Minister: Man-in-the-Middle (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 21.

relationship to God constitutes a part of the distinctiveness of pastoral counseling as compared to other counseling relationships.³⁸

As Daniel Day Williams says, "The Christian counselor knows that there is no final solution to the ills of life other than through faith in God."³⁹ Though he refrains from inappropriately lugging religion into the counseling relationship, he is fully cognizant of the biblical truth that man's unity or disunity turns on his decision concerning God's offer of love and demand for righteousness.⁴⁰

Therefore, he sees man's moral and spiritual struggle as a relevant concern of counseling, perhaps the basic and final concern of pastoral counseling.⁴¹ Among other things, he considers it entirely appropriate to his ministry of counseling to help persons realize that they exist before God, a God who need not be dreadfully feared but may be trusted and loved.⁴²

Another of the distinctive contributions of pastoral counseling is its affirmation that the counselee in the counseling

³⁸ Williams, op. cit., pp. 34, 35.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁰ Outler, op. cit., p. 91.

⁴¹ Homans, op. cit., p. 174.

⁴² Thornton, op. cit., p. 34.

relationship is not only accepted by the counselor but that he is also accepted by the ground of all being, by the final reality. By accepting the counselee with all of his strengths and weaknesses and genuinely caring for him, the pastoral counselor points to this ultimate acceptance and love.⁴³

Probably the most important distinctive of the pastoral counselor is precisely this: he points beyond the situation of crisis and beyond the counseling situation to the positive and trustworthy character of God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He may do this through words or through trust relationships. But if he is to fulfill his unique ministry, he must somehow get this message across.

If the pastoral counselor serves as a minister in a local church, he not only ministers to the individuals whom he counsels but he also serves a community of persons. He ministers to the community that surrounds his individual counselees more than do other kinds of psychotherapists. The pastoral counselor who serves in the parish context is in a position to influence not only individuals and their families but also the attitudes and mores of the community

⁴³ Thomas C. Oden, Kerygma and Counseling (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), pp. 21, 22.

as a whole. Standing between the individual and society, the minister is in a position perhaps unexcelled by any other profession to exert influence for good or for evil.⁴⁴

So, as has been shown, pastoral counseling by clergymen has made and is making some distinctive contributions of its own. When the pastoral counselor knows the value of his own uniqueness, he will be very reticent to relinquish his own special contributions in favor of a narrower mental health model. Psychotherapists who follow a narrow mental health model frequently expend all of their efforts simply to get rid of symptoms such as anxiety, depression, compulsiveness, and disorientation. The broader concept of mental health comprehended by the Christian ministry allows that neurosis can be a blessing in disguise, especially when it forces a person out of a narrow, humdrum pattern of life into a fuller realization of his own vitality and insight. Sometimes, though not always, such a condition can drive a person to a deep religious awareness and understanding through the struggle into which it thrusts him.⁴⁵ Further, the clergyman's broad concept of mental

⁴⁴ Wise, op. cit., p. 127.

⁴⁵ David E. Roberts, Psychotherapy and a Christian View of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 32.

health reminds modern psychotherapies that some so-called symptoms of mental disorder may be nothing more than very normal reactions to finitude and relative helplessness. The minister's concept emphasizes accepting one's own responsibility. It stresses an outward rather than an inward orientation. It encourages persons to accept that which they cannot control and to get on with the business of living. So the Christian pastoral counselor should not pattern his ministry after a shallow, secular concept of mental health. Rather, he should affirm the concept that encourages trustful responsibility in the religious sense--this is his natural thrust and one of his unique contributions.⁴⁶

The distinctive worth of the minister as a servant to those in crises can be illustrated by his special value to persons who are catastrophically ill. Catastrophic illness can be defined as any "illness that has massive effects on the body, mind and spirit of the patient and that cannot be rather quickly, surely, or permanently alleviated by medical skill."⁴⁷ Edward V. Stein points out seven ways that the minister as pastor or pastoral counselor can contribute valuable services to catastrophically ill patients. (1) The

⁴⁶ Howland, op. cit., p. 93.

⁴⁷ Edward V. Stein, "The Role of the Clergy in Catastrophic Illness," Journal of Pastoral Care, XX (March 1966), 24.

minister has 'pointer value' in that he points beyond himself to ultimate love and truth. (2) He can help prepare the patient for reality so that the patient may be told even painful truth. (3) He can help the patient to the understanding that health is not the ultimate end to life. (4) Facing theological issues honestly, he can show that faith is not an escape but an inner strength to face what cannot be escaped. (5) He may help the patient to overcome neurotic religious attitudes. (6) He can help the patient to broaden his value structure. (7) He can help the patient to see his illness as a means of knowledge and growth.⁴⁸

V. THE POSSIBILITY OF COOPERATION BETWEEN PASTORAL COUNSELING AND OTHER PSYCHOTHERAPIES

One might well ask whether it is not possible for the humanistic psychotherapies and pastoral counseling to join together in working toward the healing and growth of troubled persons. What is the possibility of cooperation between pastoral counseling and other psychotherapies? Since there are naturally many mutual concerns and much overlapping between these approaches, the possibilities of cooperation are promising. But complete cooperation would call for the humanistic psychotherapies to

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 25-29.

accept some of the basic premises of Christian pastoral counseling and vice versa. Pastoral counseling and the Christian Church would have to accept the clinical truth, practical wisdom, and effective service of other psychotherapies. This is not an unlikely possibility; in fact, most of the Church does already accept these contributions of psychotherapy. But just as important, the humanistic psychotherapies would need to accept some of the basic philosophical assumptions of pastoral counseling. They would need to join pastoral counseling in taking their first principles from the Christian message, or at least from some reverent religious approach.⁴⁹

If other psychotherapies are to become allied fully with the Christian Church, they must allow for such concepts as responsible selfhood and human sin that is more tragic than mere error. In some instances, this may call for a realistic debunking of libertine permissivism in favor of a clear call for responsibility. Moreover, pastoral counseling calls on other psychotherapies to acknowledge religious values and to come to grips with the idea of God. It insists that other psychotherapies acknowledge the possibility and power of grace that is more effectual than good luck

⁴⁹Outler, op. cit., p. 261.

or positive natural thrusts alone. Finally, the humanistic psychotherapies must realize that they do not have all of the truth about life any more than does pastoral counseling. They must allow for a wisdom about life that goes beyond analytical description and the empirical sciences.⁵⁰ When psychotherapists come to take the Christian Gospel seriously, they are likely to learn that it is the wisdom and power of God unto man's deepest health and salvation.⁵¹

If pastoral counseling and the Christian Church would participate in an alliance with the modern psychotherapies, they must accept some of the basic ideas of good psychotherapy. First, they must acknowledge the goodness and rightness of human sexuality, of the erotic aspect of human love. Assuming this basic truth, Christian ethicists can work toward the development of a constructive morality for man. Second, the Church must distinguish between neurosis and sin just as it distinguishes between those distortions and disorders that can be overcome by human wisdom and that estrangement-in-being that can be healed only by God's grace. The Church must allow for the possibility of rational

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 257.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 262.

patterns in human misbehavior and disorder. Next, all truth must be seen as having a divine source regardless of where it is found or who finds it. Finally, in addition to its concept of original sin, the Church must reassert its concept of original righteousness, remembering the biblical assertion that God's creation was good. The modern psychotherapies have demonstrated that man has a thrust toward health, perhaps the residues of virtue, which can be released into growth and maybe even into active righteousness. So the Church must regain a balance of emphasis on the classical motifs of original sin and original righteousness.⁵²

The field of pastoral psychology and counseling seems to come as close as anything to an alliance between Christian faith and the modern psychotherapies. In a sense, it finds its philosophical and theological basis in the Christian faith even as it utilizes the keen insights and practical wisdom of the humanistically based psychotherapies. There will always be a need for some division of labor between the traditional pastor who attends to a broad range of concerns and the specialized professional therapist whose attention is narrowly focused. The therapist cannot do all of the work of the Christian pastor any more than the Christian pastor

⁵² Ibid., pp. 258-260.

can do all of the work of the specialized professional psycho-therapist. But while some division of labor is both desirable and necessary, cooperation in working toward mutual goals is both desirable and possible.

CHAPTER III

CRISIS COUNSELING THEORY

Crisis counseling may be practiced from a secular or from a religious perspective. In the former case it is a subspecialty within the broad field of secular psychotherapy. In the latter case it is that particular form of pastoral counseling that focuses on the needs of persons in crises. In either case it shares the same general background and is based in large part on the same body of crisis and crisis intervention theory. Erich Lindemann's 1943 study of the bereavement reactions of the survivors of the Boston Cocoanut Grove fire stimulated the development of much of this theory, and crisis counseling emerged as a special form of therapy with Gerald Caplan as its chief theoretician.

I. THE EMERGENCE OF CRISIS

In order to maintain mental health and well-being, people must have certain need satisfactions. These are spoken of as supplies by Caplan, who distinguishes the following kinds of supplies which all people need.¹ First, men must have certain physical

¹Gerald Caplan, Principles of Preventive Psychiatry (New York: Basic, 1964), pp. 31-34.

supplies such as food, water, clothing, shelter, sensory stimulation, and exercise. Without at least minimal quantities of these it is impossible to maintain life. And the adequacy of these supplies affects in one way or another the quality of life maintained and the degree of physical and mental health achieved.

Second, men need certain psychosocial supplies. The need for love and affection is a part of the basic nature of man, and this need must be satisfied through interpersonal relations. Relating with other persons also helps meet the need for participation in joint activities with other human beings. Moreover, man has a psychological need for both liberty and limitation or control. He not only needs freedom but he also needs authority. Resistance to mental disorder depends on the continuity and good quality of the relationships that satisfy these psychosocial needs. These needs are met inadequately when a person does not establish meaningful relationships with others or when the significant other persons in his life fail to perceive, respect, or try to satisfy his interpersonal needs. Sometimes satisfactory relationships are interrupted through illness, disillusionment, separation, or death. This, of course, reduces or cuts off much needed supply and thus may have an adverse effect on the person's emotional well-being.

Men also need certain sociocultural supplies. For example, they have a need for society to supply certain role expectations. The role expectations of society hinder health when they are rigidly held by a group of people or are applied by individuals so stringently that they inhibit freedom and creativity. But when proffered by society with some degree of flexibility and responded to by individuals with freedom to develop their own uniqueness, these role expectations are valuable and are needed for life in an ongoing social order. Other sociocultural supplies needed by men include the stability and strength of group culture as these are embodied in language, values, and traditions. If these were not supplied by the culture, each new generation would have to start virtually from scratch and significant progress would be quite impossible. Supplies such as these help men to relate with one another in ways that are conducive to their happiness and health.

But when a person who is accustomed to a given level of physical, psychosocial, and sociocultural supplies has these cut off suddenly or reduced significantly, he becomes involved in an emotionally hazardous situation that may precipitate a crisis. As has been indicated before, some crises are associated with maturational change and confusion. These are the normal developmental crises. Others are periods of psychological and behavioral upset

caused by the hazards of life that involve loss of supplies, the danger of such loss, or the threat of missing the opportunity for increased supplies.² These are called exceptional situational crises and are our main concern here. Situational crises are usually short transitional periods lasting from one to perhaps five to seven weeks.

Normally when a situation becomes problematic for a person, he responds to it on the basis of his past experience. He may become somewhat accustomed to the tension that is caused by the problem. But if the tension continues unrelieved or increases in intensity he acts to relieve the tension by attempting to eliminate the problem. In any case the problem activates certain problem-solving mechanisms within him, many of which are habitually and sometimes even unconsciously employed. These usually solve the problem within a rather brief period of time, and the person is able to relax from the tension that was created by the problem. But when his problem-solving mechanisms do not bring a solution and the problem is not resolved within a certain period of time, a crisis is precipitated by the discrepancy between the difficulty and importance of the problem and the resources immediately available

²Ibid., p. 35.

to handle it.³ The person may display signs of increased tension and crisis by acting in ways that are inconsistent with his normal behavioral patterns. These signs are recognized by those around him who hopefully get him to some competent help if he is not already getting such assistance. Good counseling at a time like this can help a person to overcome the crisis so that his normal emotional equilibrium can return. His behavior after the crisis may become similar to what it was before the crisis or it may be quite different for the rest of his life.

One of the important characteristics of crises is that they usually move through definite phases. A crisis does not emerge and endure indefinitely. On the contrary, it emerges and lasts for a relatively short period of time, moving from one phase to another until it is no longer a crisis. Caplan teaches that crises characteristically move through the following four phases.⁴

1. The first phase is marked by a reduction or loss of emotional equilibrium due to the impact of whatever causes the crisis, e.g., the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, the threat to one's bodily integrity because of an accident, illness, or surgery.

³Ibid., p. 35.

⁴Ibid., pp. 40, 41.

Whatever the cause, this stimulus generates increased emotional tension within the person. The increase of tension triggers habitual problem-solving responses which are, in effect, the person's first attempts at regaining homeostasis.

2. If these habitual problem-solving responses do not work and the stimulus causing the tension continues, the person enters the second phase of the crisis. This phase is characterized by a further buildup of tension, a general state of being upset, and sometimes temporary immobilization. The person may experience unpleasant feelings such as anxiety, fear, guilt, or shame.

3. Additional tension increase moves the crisis into its third phase when hidden internal and external coping resources are brought into play. The person mobilizes his emergency problem-solving abilities and applies new methods to the task of problem resolution. By this time the intensity of the problem might have lessened to the point where it can be handled without too much difficulty. If not, the person may be able to redefine the problem in a way that will bring it within the range of his experience. He may become aware of neglected aspects of the problem and connect these with neglected capacities and problem-solving techniques. He may decide that it is impossible for him to deal with certain aspects of the problem but, at the same time, conclude that these

"impossibilities" are not crucial to coming to grips with the situation as a whole. He may redefine his goal, giving up some overambitious aspirations. Very likely he will examine numerous alternatives to find out which are live options and which are dead-end streets. Then he will try out some of the alternatives that are open to him. As a result of all of these added efforts, newly unveiled resources, and perhaps some redefinition of the problem and/or goals, the person may be able to resolve the problem and overcome the crisis. If so, he re-establishes relationships which had been temporarily upset by the problem, and the crisis is over. If not, he moves into the fourth phase of the crisis.

4. If the problem is not solved or avoided by redefinition of need, tension will increase eventually to the breaking point, and a major personality disorganization may occur, bringing with it drastic results. The person may find sociopathological ways of dealing with his difficulties, or he may experience some kind of psychotic break and have to be hospitalized. While not necessarily the case, for some this may be the tragic end of the precipitating crisis and the beginning of serious mental illness. For others, especially those who deal with their crises in wholesome ways, a crisis may turn out to be an exceptional opportunity for growth toward psychological adequacy and toward mental and spiritual health.

In one sense, crises are the exception to the normal pattern of everyday living. They are exceptionally critical occurrences of major significance to the persons who experience them. But in another sense, life crises are common to all men. Everyone experiences them at one time or another in greater or lesser measure. It is quite conceivable that if it were possible to magnify any segment of life one might be able to observe numerous tiny crises, e.g., the myriad "decisions" made quite unconsciously during every waking hour of a person's life. To put it another way, a minute-by-minute study of a person's life would show a pattern of constant flux. There seems to be some kind of continuum between these tiny crises and the major crises that call for special outside assistance, just as there is a continuum between the small minute-by-minute changes and the major changes in a person's life from one period to another. The casual observer does not notice the minute crises or the small changes. He is unaware of minor changes because his attention is focused on continuity and perhaps captivated occasionally by a major crisis. The change that is made evident by the periodization of life may very well be caused by the crises suggested above, major change in the life cycle being the result of numerous crises of varying significance occurring over a long period of time. What seems to happen in a major crisis is

that development is accelerated and a great deal of change takes place in a short period of time. Thus major crises, though of relatively brief duration, contribute significantly, for better or worse, to the process of human development.⁵

A crisis is a crucial experience in human development not only because a great deal of progress or regression can take place in a short period of time but also because a person is more open to help when he is in the midst of a crisis than when he is experiencing relative stability. The increased tension of crisis motivates him to seek and to accept assistance from others.⁶ Interestingly, this increased desire for help on the part of the person in crisis finds its counterpart in that potential helping persons experience a helping response that is stimulated by the recognition of someone's critical need.⁷ Perhaps this helping response is a part of man's basic nature as a social animal. At any rate, because a person in crisis is more open to the influence of others, a crisis situation "presents care-giving persons with a remarkable opportunity to deploy their efforts to maximum advantage in influencing the mental

⁵ Ibid., pp. 38, 39.

⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 53, 54.

health of others."⁸ A crisis is a situation laden with potential for dramatic change for better or for worse. So by its very nature a crisis offers the possibility and the hope that a competent counselor may be able to help the crisis-ridden person to maximal healing and growth for the relatively minimal time spent in counseling.

In order to achieve this kind of efficient progress, the counseling should center on the here and now, i.e., on present relationships, problems, and concerns. In fact, one of the important principles of crisis counseling is that the outcome of a crisis is not usually determined decisively by factors that are antecedent to the crisis itself. The counselee's past experiences are relevant only insofar as they remain with him as significant factors in his present situation.

But while antecedent factors are not usually decisive in and of themselves, they may very well give some indication of the counselee's chances of successfully surmounting his present difficulties. For example, a person who has a history of dealing with crises by withdrawing, refusing help, or ignoring the seriousness of his situation is less likely to transform his present crisis into a means of growth than is the person whose record indicates a

⁸Ibid., p. 54.

healthy handling of past crises. Furthermore, the past may be linked to the present in that the counselee may be affected strongly by factors in his present situation that have a symbolic relationship to past problems. If so, his ability to handle his present situation may be determined in part by whether these past problems were resolved adequately. Another factor that affects the counselee's chances of overcoming his crisis is what others expect of him in such a situation and, indeed, what he expects of himself. These expectations may spur healthy action as long as they do not become excessive demands that overburden the crisis-ridden person with immobilizing pressure. Other factors that affect the probably outcome of a crisis are the person's general personality, his health, the kinds of external social resources that are available to him, the communication system of his social setting, and even certain apparent chance aspects of his crisis situation.⁹

The important thing to remember in dealing with a crisis situation is that antecedent factors are of relatively less importance than are factors that have to do with the situation as it presently is. Antecedent factors may affect the person's chances of successfully dealing with the crisis, but they are not decisive. The quality of

⁹Ibid., pp. 41, 42.

help he receives from someone who intervenes in his behalf may mean the difference between growth and deterioration as a result of the crisis. In effect, each new crisis is laden with new potential so that it gives a person another chance to correct earlier unhealthy problem-solving habits and to develop new and better ones in their place.¹⁰

II. THE INVOLVEMENT OF SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

In counseling with a person during a time of crisis, one should remember that human life is lived in a complex web of relationships. No counselee experiences a crisis alone. He is surrounded by other persons who are affected by his crisis and who in turn affect him during his crisis. The counselee may be helped or hindered by his family, friends, and associates. People who are linked to him in relationships of love, fellowship, authority, or dependence have the greatest affect upon him. Formal care-giving agents such as ministers, physicians, nurses, and social workers are an important influence, especially those who work with his

¹⁰ Lydia Rapoport, "The State of Crisis: Some Theoretical Considerations," in Howard J. Parad (ed.) Crisis Intervention (New York: Family Service Association of America, 1965), p. 24.

family as a whole and are thus in a position to influence his primary relationships. Others such as merchants, bartenders, pharmacists, and senior citizens have an informal relationship and may also influence him significantly for better or worse.¹¹ Even his whole community and nation may have an effect upon how he handles his crisis through the introjection of certain values, customs, and traditions that may either confuse the situation or sustain and guide him through it.¹²

A wise counselor is aware of these external influences, some of which might have been quite significantly internalized by the counselee. But the counselor should also remain alert to the impact that the crisis may be having upon those who have close emotional ties with the counselee. They are under pressures that are greater than normal during the counselee's crisis and may, therefore, need special guidance and support themselves. In fact, special sessions with the family of the primary counselee may very well prevent the situation from reaching crisis proportions for them. Moreover, counseling may help the family to gain the strengths needed to support wise problem-solving action on the part

¹¹ Caplan, op. cit., p. 49.

¹² Ibid., p. 43.

of the counselee. Indeed, it may even so improve the home environment that some kinds of problems may simply cease to exist.

Since a person in crisis is more dependent than usual on personal relationships, whether they hamper or heal, it is important to know how the significant others in his life can be a positive force and avoid negatively influencing him. Normally a counselee's family constitutes one of his most important relational groups. So the crisis counselor is especially interested in whether the family is characterized by qualities that are conducive to good crisis adjustment. Helpful characteristics include qualities such as family adaptability, family integration, affectional relations among family members, good marital adjustment on the part of the husband and wife, companionable parent-child relationships, participation of the whole family in the making of important decisions, and prior successful experience in handling crises.¹³

As a matter of fact, the very way a counselee's family is structured may determine whether this primary social group is a positive or negative force during a crisis. It helps if the family has

¹³ Reuben Hill, "Generic Features of Families Under Stress," in Parad, op. cit., pp. 48f.

a clear and mutually acceptable system of authority, if there are open lines of communication among family members, and if the roles taken by the various members are complementary rather than conflicting. A family structure characterized by poorly defined authority, lack of communication, or continual confusion of roles tends to aggravate an emotional predicament.¹⁴

A person in crisis almost inevitably experiences painful feelings such as guilt, anxiety, shame, depression, or hostility.¹⁵ These feelings may be abated or acerbated, depending upon the way other members of the family relate to him and to one another. The family should avoid action that would intensify these feelings and place additional strain on the crisis-ridden person. But they should also be careful not to encourage suppressive or repressive avoidance of the problem. By the same token, the family should not encourage fantasy or symbolic solutions which project guilt and hostility on others either inside or outside of the family group.¹⁶

This does not mean that all of the person's defensive mechanisms should be clogged up. Limited defensive maneuvers often play an important part in crisis resolution by keeping

¹⁴ Caplan, op. cit., pp. 45-48.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 45, 46.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 46-48.

perception of the problem within manageable limits or by relaxing tension to the point where issues can be seen more clearly and dealt with. Wrestling with a crisis is extremely hard work. Just as difficult physical labor calls for times of rest, so a person struggling with a crisis needs times to relax from the struggle. Because of this need, there is normally a waxing and waning of crisis tension as the problem is alternately held in consciousness and blocked out of it. The person's family should be aware of this need for rest but, at the same time, they should be sensitive enough to know when legitimate rest becomes unhealthy problem avoidance and should not hesitate to awaken the sleeper if this lasts too long.¹⁷ In short, the family should discourage the person from merely avoiding the problem or limiting himself to tension-reducing activities alone, and they should encourage him in such wholesome activities as finding the satisfaction of his need or, when this is not possible, resigning himself to this fact and seeking alternative satisfactions.

III. COPING RESPONSES

Earlier it was noted that a person's chances of coping satisfactorily with a crisis were suggested, though not determined,

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 46, 46.

by the way in which he had dealt with crises in the past. In other words, a person's past may affect his present and future. But it is also true that present action may mollify the impact of residues from the past, as well as wield its own particular influence with reference to the future. For instance, healthy, reality-based, socially acceptable responses to situations of great stress often bring about the resolution of previously unresolved problems and add to the likelihood that future problems will be met with improved coping skills. On the other hand, unhealthy responses to a present crisis may aggravate previously unresolved problems, as well as lessen one's ability to deal with those that may occur in the future. For this reason it is important for the crisis counselor to be able to distinguish between maladaptive and healthy coping responses.

If during a crisis a counselee spends a great deal of his time thinking about and hoping for some magical solution to his problems and at the same time does little that is constructive to solve them, he is engaging in the costly luxury of refusing to face the realities of his situation. The same is true if he responds to his crisis with other forms of withdrawal from reality such as excessive drinking, fantasizing, daydreaming, gluttony, or preoccupation with sex. These are maladaptive ways of dealing with a stressful situation. Another unhealthy response is to engage

in regressive and childish behavior such as pouting, pitying oneself, or throwing temper tantrums. Sometimes, however, a person may carefully avoid reactions such as these, giving the appearance that he is very much in control of himself. Yet his counselor may notice indications of somatic reaction, i.e., the development of some kind of physical disorder due to emotional disturbance. The counselor recognizes this as symptomatic of a more basic problem and evidence that the person is dealing with it in unsatisfactory ways.

In contrast to these maladaptive crisis responses, Lydia Rapoport suggests several positively helpful responses.¹⁸ For one thing, the person should seek to obtain a correct cognitive perception of his problem. Thinking about it and talking with others may be very helpful in this regard. He should try to clarify his feelings and deal with them so that they do not build up and unnecessarily complicate his emotional state. This can be done through verbalization or perhaps through other forms of tension-releasing activity. He may also seek new ideals or new models of identification as a part of solving the problem. Another helpful response is to take an active, task-oriented approach in handling the problem.

¹⁸Rapoport, op. cit., pp. 28, 29.

It frequently helps to break down the problem into its various component parts and to try to solve each of them on its own. Finally, the person should seek help in dealing with his feelings and his various problem-solving tasks. He should make use of all of the resources that are available to him, including institutional as well as interpersonal resources.

A person in crisis may exhibit any one or more of these various kinds of responses or any of innumerable other possible responses. Usually, however, he will respond in ways that eventually suggest some over-all pattern of behavior, either generally adaptive, maladaptive, or some combination of the two. His counselor is then in a position to zero in on the emotional predicament and offer some genuine help.

IV. WAYS OF HELPING A PERSON IN CRISIS

The kind of help that is offered depends, among other things, on the personality of the distressed individual, the nature of his problem, the availability of needed resources, and the therapeutic approach of his counselor. For people who are caught in the throes of crisis, long-term psychotherapy is usually not at all necessary, even for those who are financially able to afford it. As has already been indicated, a crisis is by definition a relatively .

brief experience, usually lasting for a period of not more than seven weeks. Because a person in the midst of such an experience is highly susceptible to influence and usually quite ready for change, the first few counseling sessions may very well determine the outcome of the crisis. For this reason short-term therapy is usually indicated. This is fortunate not only because it conserves time and money but also because it provides significant help for persons who would not sustain a counseling relationship over a long period of time. For example, persons from the lower socio-economic strata of society, who rarely continue in counseling for more than two or three interviews,¹⁹ can obtain valuable and sometimes desperately needed help through short-term crisis counseling.

While crisis counseling is usually more efficient than other forms of therapy in terms of net return for effort expended, efficiency and shortness of therapy should not be stressed at the expense of meaningfulness. Happily, however, meaningfulness does not have to be sacrificed, primarily because the crisis itself gives added force to the natural human thrusts toward wholeness and crisis counseling takes advantage of this. This does not mean that

¹⁹ Wayne E. Oates, Protestant Pastoral Counseling (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 150.

all of the person's problems are solved. But can any therapy honestly claim to be truly exhaustive?²⁰ What does happen is that the person is helped, and helped a great deal, by a therapeutic approach that not only takes seriously his problem but also genuinely respects and utilizes his potential for health.

This kind of counseling gives a person who is struggling with crucial problems a chance to benefit from the strengths of a fellow human being. He is able to fulfill his dependency needs at a time when this can be of much value. Moreover, talking with an understanding and caring counselor affords the opportunity for catharsis, an experience that not only makes a person feel better but may also enable him to think straighter and act more positively. Even when counseling does not continue for more than a few sessions, the counselor can provide some guidance and assist the troubled person in structuring his situation.²¹

The crisis counselor can move rapidly toward helping a person in crisis by structuring the counseling to meet specific current needs. It is not necessary to delve deeply into the person's

²⁰ E. Lakin Phillips and Daniel N. Wiener, Short-term Psychotherapy and Structured Behavior Change (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 19.

²¹ Ibid., p. 23.

past nor to spend a great deal of time digging for unconscious material. As valuable as these procedures may be in psycho-analysis and psychiatric research, they simply are not designed to provide quick and effective assistance to persons in crisis. Therefore, historical analysis should be minimized and the possible therapeutic value of psychologically re-experiencing the past forfeited for the most part. At the same time, the counselor should keep his ear tuned for problems that seem to have a history of persistently re-occurring, especially if these problems are related to the current crisis. Though concentrating a great deal of attention upon the past is just not the best way to use one's time in helping a person in crisis, it may be an alternative way of working with a person when a more direct way does not succeed. When a person is suffering a crisis, however, an anamnestic approach is not the place to begin and in most cases will not be necessary at all.²²

The place to begin in counseling with a person in crisis is where he is hurting.²³ His problem or problems should be identified

²² Ibid., pp. 48, 207.

²³ One could say that the ideal place to begin is to anticipate the crisis before it occurs, though this is seldom done in actual practice. Caplan indicates that great value can derive from a counselor's recognizing in advance the danger faced by certain people, and, through a technique known as "anticipatory guidance" (Cont'd)

and defined as soon as possible so that therapy can be directed specifically toward them. Surprisingly, the person is not usually fully aware of the precipitating stress and its consequences, and emotional equilibrium can be assisted through therapy that comes to grips with these.²⁴ Anything that is troubling the counselee or any behavior that may be causing problems for others is appropriate material for discussion. But counseling should focus rapidly on the most important conflict or the chief area of concern, and most of the therapeutic attention should be concentrated on this.

The crisis counselor should not hesitate to urge his counselee toward specific kinds of positive action. The counselor is not bound to non-directive approaches. Indeed, it is entirely in order for him to feed discreetly the dependency needs of the counselee who is struggling with a crisis. Once the crisis is past some attention can be given to the counselee's need to depend more upon

²³(Cont'd) or "emotional inoculation," anticipating with them the experience in detail, including potential feelings of anxiety, tension, depression, and deprivation. The counselor then helps them to foresee various positive ways of handling the situation along with the accompanying negative feelings. When the situation is actually faced, the people are better prepared to meet it. (Caplan, op. cit., pp. 84, 85) What a tremendous benefit such an approach could be in working with relatives of terminal cancer patients, to mention just an example! This is preventive counseling at its best, and the minister is in an ideal position to take full advantage of this kind of procedure.

²⁴Rapoport, op. cit., p. 29.

himself. But during the critical period, the counselor may be of real help by exercising his gifts as an architect of change. He may act to manipulate variables within the person's life situation, or he may get others to do so.²⁵ Sometimes it may be wise to contact other professionals who themselves intervene in the counselee's behalf. At all times the counselor should be careful to reinforce desirable behavior on the part of the counselee, regardless of who suggested it. And it can be doubly helpful to point out that certain positive actions were initiated by the person himself, when this is in fact the case.

Since there are times in crisis counseling when the counselee's defenses should not be directly challenged and other times when it is important that he be taught to take full responsibility for his own behavior, the counselor should be sensitively discriminating in his decision as to which approach is called for by the particular circumstances. He should not forget, however, that in most cases, after a comfortable and supportive relationship has been established, the counselee is in a better position to deal effectively with his situation if he has a clear picture of what is happening to him than if his mind is cluttered with debris from the never-never land of

²⁵ Phillips, op. cit., p. 10.

unreality. So helping him to gain an increased understanding of his situation can renew his hope for influencing the outcome of his crisis.

Several means of help can contribute to this increased understanding. For one thing the counselor can encourage the expression of negative feelings and thus aid in clearing the counselee's mind of unnecessary interference. This may open important lines of communication with relatives and friends. But counseling must move beyond mere expression and catharsis to the point where something is done about the cause of the crisis. So the counselor should help to clarify the problem and should explore with the counselee various alternative solutions or at least possible courses of action. The counselee is then in a position to do something concrete about his situation, and the counselor can encourage him to do it by challenging him to test what he has learned in the counseling session with some kind of definite action toward the resolution of his difficulty and the improvement of his life.

CHAPTER IV

THE MINISTER AS A CRISIS COUNSELOR

At the beginning of the last chapter it was pointed out that crisis counseling could be practiced from a secular perspective, as a sub-specialty within the broad field of secular psychotherapy, or from a religious perspective, as that particular form of pastoral counseling that focuses on the needs of persons in crises. In either case it is usually founded for the most part on much the same body of crisis and crisis counseling theory. The guiding intention of the present chapter, which assumes that discussion as its basic theoretical foundation, is to indicate how crisis counseling theory can be applied practically in the pastoral work of the minister to bring healing and help to those persons who come to him with their crucial needs.

I. THE PROFESSIONAL PERSONA OF THE MINISTER

In order for the minister, or any other caring agent for that matter, to be able to use his talents and skills fully to promote the well-being of another person, he needs to know who he himself is, first of all, and, secondly, what he has to offer. In addition, he

must inwardly value himself and have confidence that what he can contribute is needed by and worthful to those he seeks to serve. This important issue of knowing one's own identity and valuing or loving the person who is characterized by it is of supreme importance to those who would counsel with persons in mental and emotional distress. Strangely, however, many ministers seem to have an especially difficult time with this problem. This seems rather odd in light of surveys which indicate that the minister is held in high esteem by society as a whole and, in fact, ranks very high among the various professionals in terms of the prestige and status he has as a result of his particular contribution to community life.

One might well wonder, then, why many ministers find it hard to have genuine confidence in themselves and to appreciate fully their contribution to the human enterprise. Perhaps it is partly because the ministry is the only one of the great professions that still expects most of its members to function as generalists --generalists in an age of specialization. It is easy for a minister to feel like a jack of all trades and the master of none. Of course, one could contend, and rightly so, that, in a world where nations, communities, and individuals are fragmented and torn apart by conflicting loyalties and concerns, no vocation is needed more than

one that seeks to synthesize, to integrate, and to minister with wholistic objectives. That certainly seems to be true. But the minister may wonder why his financial remuneration tends to be so much below other professionals of comparable training and experience, if in fact his contribution is so valuable and important to the community. He, too, may be taken in by the commercial orientation of a society that often accesses the value of products or services according to the price tag they carry, regardless of whether this has any legitimate relationship to their real worth.

There are other possible reasons why some ministers find it especially difficult to sense adequately the legitimacy and significance of their vocation. In an era that is fascinated with the future, they are called upon to conserve that part of the past that has continuing value. Moreover, they work with intangibles that are difficult to define and measure and with invisible realities that are not demonstrable by the highly respected empirical sciences. Furthermore, in contrast to the other major professions, the ministry is subject to a great deal of lay evaluation. This may tend to stifle freedom and to give the impression that the minister has little of special value to offer.

All of these are possible reasons why some ministers struggle with problems of identity, self-confidence, and self-worth.

There are, of course, many other reasons, including some that are more strictly psychological and less related to the external circumstances in which the minister finds himself. Be that as it may, the important point is this: the minister must learn who he is, come to appreciate himself as a person, and gain some confidence in the value of what he, as a unique human being, can contribute to others if he is going to be able to use fully his resources to help deeply troubled persons who seek his counsel.

Gerald Caplan speaks to this point in his discussion of what he calls the professional persona of the helping agent. He says that each profession has developed through history along lines of helping certain classes of people with certain problems in certain ways.¹ For example, the ministry as a profession tries to help persons to live their lives in keeping with the Christian faith. The ministry focuses on certain human problems and brings its own repertoire of resources to bear upon them. Each profession has its own identity, and its practitioners have a special kind of training which enables them to make their own particular contribution to human welfare. Through his training and identification each professional person

¹ Gerald Caplan, Principles of Preventive Psychiatry (New York: Basic, 1964), pp. 50, 51.

develops his own professional persona--his particular set of ways of selecting and ordering his perceptions of his clients so that he deals with certain aspects of their problems.² Now each profession provides its practitioners with various ways of helping people in crises. Ideally, these ways promote health rather than hinder it, and at the same time they achieve the goals of the profession. For instance, when a minister seeks to help someone in crisis, he may work with the person in a series of crises counseling sessions so that the crisis may be resolved in ways that are productive of emotional health and, at the same time, the person may be led to a new level of Christian experience.

Unfortunately, sometimes persons trained for and practicing within one profession lose faith in the values and unique contributions of that profession and, without adequate re-training, seek to take on some other professional persona while still engaged ostensibly in the practice of their first profession. This is often the result of comparing the worst within one approach with the best in the other. In making this kind of shift, the person usually forsakes many of the goals of the former profession and yet, due to the lack of professional competence, is unable to realize fully the goals

² Ibid.

of the substitute profession. This, of course, is not to say that there are no areas of overlap among the various professions, for certainly there are such common areas in terms of both means and ends. What is suggested, however, is that this kind of proclivity can be fraught with hazards, hazards that are neither necessary nor desirable.

Pastoral counselors must be alert lest they make this kind of futile mistake. For since much of their work involves the employment of psychological insights and skills, they may be tempted frequently to limit themselves to psychological counseling only. But pastoral counseling when understood rightly is spiritual counseling in the best sense of that term. The clergyman usually cheats both himself and his counselee when, relinquishing the special kind of healing resources that are a part of his professional persona as a Christian minister, he limits himself to only psychological and psychiatric ways of perceiving and dealing with emotional problems and personal crises. If he adopts the professional persona of one of the psychological disciplines without change or adaptation, he inevitably does so at the expense of his own professional persona and fails, therefore, to make the contribution that, presumably, he is particularly qualified to make. In order to counteract this kind of possibility and to provide the broadest range of healing forces within

the community, Caplan asserts that each profession needs to develop its own knowledge and technical insights so that its members can serve people in crises with more confidence and in a more standardized professional way, helping them toward mental health as well as fulfilling the basic objectives of the profession.³

Since the primary concern of this chapter is to suggest how this might be done in the case of the Christian ministry, perhaps some consideration should be given, first of all, to the identity of the Christian minister. One might begin by pointing out that the minister is a part of a long line of helping persons whose religious and professional heritage stretches back at least as far as the time of Jesus. Indeed, the roots of this vocation reach deep into the history of Israel, antedating the Christian era by several centuries. But since the ministry has developed along a number of different lines and taken on a great diversity of styles, it is difficult to present a composite picture of what the ministry is really like. To trace its history and survey its various forms would be to move too far afield from the central purpose intended here.

What can be done, however, is to look briefly at the origins of the Christian ministry and to note characteristics that seem to be

³Ibid., p. 52.

a part of its essential nature. An excellent picture of the ministry of Jesus is given in Matthew 9:3-10:16. According to this biblical passage, Jesus engaged in a vigorous ministry of healing the sick, announcing forgiveness of sins, teaching by example and by precept, proclaiming good news, and liberating from demonic influence those who were bound. His ministry is summarized in the following words:

Jesus went about all their cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.⁴

It was in this kind of context that Jesus called the twelve disciples and later the seventy, authorizing and empowering them to carry on a similar ministry. In fact, the New Testament attributes him with saying to his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, even so send I you."⁵ Of course, it was much later before the Christian ministry developed into a full-blown profession in the contemporary sense of that term. But while numerous forms of ministry have emerged subsequently, their chief prototype has been, for the most part, the ministry of Jesus. Carroll A. Wise

⁴Matthew 9:35, 36.

⁵John 20:21.

suggests that the Christian pastor is a person who conveys to other persons some of the quality of being conveyed to persons by Jesus.⁶

It is interesting that the New Testament image of the pastor places him in the same relationship to God as the people to whom he ministers. He does not have access to special channels of grace merely because he is a minister. This is the point that was accented by the great Reformation doctrine concerning the priesthood of all believers. Normally the minister has more conceptual knowledge of matters pertaining to the Christian faith than do most of those to whom he ministers. Accordingly, his responsibilities may be greater. But he must remember that he shares the ministry or work of reconciliation with other Christians, most of whom are not professional ministers.

Realizing that he, too, is a man, the minister must find his worth precisely in the fact of his human-ness. As he is freed from the bondage of false pretenses and repressed anxieties and joins the rest of the human race, including his counselees, in quest for the meaning of life, his potential for being a channel of grace is released, and he fulfills his calling as a true minister of God.⁷ He

⁶ Carroll A. Wise, The Meaning of Pastoral Care (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 1.

⁷ Daniel Day Williams, The Minister and the Care of Souls (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 101.

not only blesses but he is also blessed. As Ernest E. Bruder says so penetratingly, "Where one dares to trust the Gospel to the extent that one descends into the hell which life often is, one cannot escape finding his way to God Himself."⁸ When the pastoral counselor moves with a deeply troubled person through some serious emotional quagmire, sharing a relationship with him that at various times could be called superficial, dependent, creative, apathetic, withdrawing, or hostile, he may come to the point where both he and his counselee participate together in an experience that could aptly be called being in the presence of God.⁹ Experiences such as this may be celebrated quite properly by some meaningful religious ritual--perhaps a prayer, a word of thanks, a laugh, a tear, or the clasping of hands of brother-man with brother-man.

What is really being said here is that, while the ministry does have some goals that are uniquely different from those of other professions, its goals are not limited to the mere proclamation of the basic message of the Church, i. e., the Christian kerygma, as important as that proclamation may be. It takes more

⁸Ernest E. Bruder, Ministering to Deeply Troubled People (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 59.

⁹Edward E. Thornton, Theology and Pastoral Counseling (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 83, 84.

than preaching alone to communicate the Word of God. That "more" is added when the minister exemplifies his faith in God and love for persons by entering deeply and imaginatively into the struggles and conflicts of persons in crises.¹⁰ When they find that he cares enough to really listen and that he accepts them even when they express feelings that are socially forbidden, they experience a relationship of grace that strengthens them in the face of their crises. What Henry Nelson Wieman said some forty years ago is still true: "Black despair will scarcely clutch and hold for long if one can talk it out with a friend who understands."¹¹

A part of the professional persona of the minister is to be this kind of friend to those he serves. One of the great advantages he has as a counselor, and especially as a crisis counselor, is that he has a relationship with most of his counselees that is not limited to any series of formal counseling sessions. Because his counseling ministry is a part of a broad program of pastoral care, he usually has established some kind of meaningful relationship with his counselees long before their time of special need. In many cases, he

¹⁰ Wise, op. cit., pp. 3, 6.

¹¹ Henry Nelson Wieman, The Issues of Life (New York: Abingdon Press, 1930), p. 45.

has been with them through most of the developmental and situational crises of their lives. Moreover, he continues to have a relationship with them long after the formal counseling has ended. Consequently, unlike most other helping professionals, he is in a position to evaluate their progress after the termination of formal counseling, to be available in case of temporary or emergency setbacks, and to provide additional opportunities of growth over a long period of time.

As a crisis counselor the minister also enjoys the advantage of knowing others within the counselee's network of primary and secondary relationships. This means that he has invaluable information about the counselee, his situation, resources that are available to him, and hazards that must be taken into consideration. While other therapists can quickly obtain some of the essential information needed to help the person during his crisis, few, if any, have the reservoir of knowledge about the person and his circumstances that is commonly available to the counseling pastor.

The minister as a crisis counselor not only enjoys the advantages of a continuing relationship with the counselee, his family, and others within his social vortex, he also has numerous helping resources at his disposal, such as those that are discussed in the next chapter. He can use various members of his congregation to help out in ways ranging from providing supportive

fellowship for the person in crisis to helping him with different kinds of practical problems. For example, he may ask someone who is about the counselee's own age to befriend him and try to get him involved in some of the social activities of the church. Or in another case, the minister may ask someone from the ladies' society to provide temporary or part-time child care for a mother who must undergo surgery and has no relatives or close friends nearby. He can use the group life of the church to promote healing and the educational program to foster growth and spiritual development. Furthermore, when he preaches with genuine concern and insight and brings meaningful theological truths to bear upon real human needs, he uses his pulpit privilege as a means of counseling with and helping a great number of people with many different kinds of problems.

Finally, the minister is in an auspicious position as a crisis counselor because he, more than any other helping professional, is likely to be consulted by people during their life crises, when conditions are optimal for their being helped substantially. For instance, when a marriage conflict moves from the stage of a private misunderstanding to that of social involvement, the minister is usually the first person to whom the couple turns for help. He has the advantage of being consulted when, due to the pain of their

experience, the couple reaches the most propitious point of their crisis, the time when they may best be helped.¹²

Affirming that a meaningful ministry to crisis-ridden persons is an important part of the pastoral work of the Christian minister, Wayne E. Oates says,

The pastor moves from one crisis to another with those whom he shepherds.... Two thousand years of Christian ministry have conditioned Christians to expect their pastors to be with them at these times of crisis. Therefore, the Christian pastor comes to his task in the strength of a great heritage. Even though he feels a sense of awe in the presence of the mysterious and tremendous crises of life, he also feels a sense of security in the fact that his people both want and expect him to be present at their times of testing.¹³

II. SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF CRISIS PASTORAL COUNSELING

Since it is clear that crisis counseling is a worthwhile form of Christian ministry, consideration can now be given more specifically to the application of crisis and crisis counseling theory in work of the counseling minister.

¹² Wayne E. Oates, Protestant Pastoral Counseling (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 241.

¹³ Wayne E. Oates, The Christian Pastor (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), p. 1.

One of the basic assumptions of crisis pastoral counseling is that crises happen in people rather than to them. That is to say, a crisis is not a set of circumstances that causes or threatens to cause personal injury or loss to someone. A crisis is the acute disturbance which may occur within that person when he is unable to cope adequately on his own with such a set of circumstances. This implies the possibility that good counseling may effect a resolution of a crisis even when the circumstances that stimulated it are completely beyond the control of either the counselor or the counselee.

Another assumption of crisis counseling is that every experience of crisis calls for some kind of judgment or decision to be made. The English word crisis is cognate with the Greek word krisis, and in the New Testament krisis means judgment.¹⁴ When the Chinese write about a crisis, they portray vividly its characteristic as an experience calling for decision or judgment. One of the Chinese words for crisis is made up of two characters, one indicating danger and the other opportunity. That is precisely what a crisis involves--danger and opportunity. Just as a fork in the

¹⁴Carl Michalson, Faith for Personal Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 3-6.

road confronts a traveler with a decisive choice, so an experience of crisis confronts a person with the necessity of decision. He may choose to respond to his crisis in constructive reality-oriented ways or he may decide to respond in ways that are not constructive. But he cannot avoid decision. Even apathetic withdrawal or so-called problem avoidance entails a decision for which the person must assume responsibility. One of the minister's tasks in crisis counseling is to steer the person toward realistic and healthy ways of responding to his situation.

A third assumption which the minister can make safely when he counsels with someone during a crisis is that the relationship he establishes with that person will probably have a more powerful influence for good or ill than any insights the person is likely to acquire. So crisis counseling is essentially relational and problem-oriented rather than insight-oriented. It is concerned primarily with interpersonal relationships and only secondarily with intrapsychic needs. Accordingly, the minister's crisis counseling should be supportive and intensely pastoral.

The pastoral counselor can assume from the beginning that he does not have to know all of the factors from the counselee's past that have contributed to bringing him to a particular point of crisis. A crisis is the result not only of stress factors from one's past but

also of present stresses and hopes or fears about the future. So a person is affected by the realities of the moment and by the pull of the future as well as by the push of the past. This gives the minister leverage that can be employed most beneficially in behalf of the counselee. The minister can major in dealing with present factors and in building realistic hopes for the future and minor in factors from the person's past that may have continuing relevance. In light of most minister's training, available time, and total responsibilities, few counseling approaches, if any, can match this for usefulness in the pastoral ministry.

Of course, crisis counseling methods, while useful at various levels of experience, can be employed with maximal effectiveness only if the counselee is really in a crisis. This is because these methods are designed to take full advantage of the healing and growth-fostering forces that are a part of the nature of crisis experience. In view of this, occasionally the minister may be of real service to a counselee by helping members of his family to release him, i. e., to free him to pay the price of his own error by refusing to protect him or to come to his defense when he is about to reap the bitter rewards of irresponsible living.¹⁵ To be sure,

¹⁵ Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 173.

when an irresponsible and blundering person is released in this way, he may have to endure a sharp increase in difficult and painful experiences. But sometimes this is exactly what he needs to bring him to the therapeutically propitious point of surrender. Surrendering, in this sense, means giving up perfectionism, denials of reality, and unwillingness to accept help. When a person experiences this kind of surrender, he becomes more open to change and more willing to accept those aspects of his situation that are unchangeable. This kind of surrender is similar to what often happens in Christian conversion. It is not the giving up of despair. On the contrary, it is that kind of acknowledgment of one's weakness that brings a new kind of strength.¹⁶ Indeed, it may be a deep spiritual experience.

Harry M. Tiebout says,

A religious or spiritual awakening is the act of giving up one's reliance on one's omnipotence. The defiant individual no longer defies but accepts help, guidance and control from outside. And as the individual relinquishes his negative, aggressive feelings toward himself and toward life, he finds himself overwhelmed by strongly positive ones such as love, friendliness, peacefulness.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 165, 166.

¹⁷ Harry M. Tiebout, "Alcoholics Anonymous and the Medical Profession" (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous, 1955), p. 24.

So the release of an individual by those near to him may be a genuine act of love in that it allows him to "hit bottom" in order that the healing and growth-fostering forces of crisis can begin to thrust him toward health.

III. VARIOUS LEVELS OF CRISIS PASTORAL COUNSELING

Sometimes a question is raised as to whether ministers should involve themselves in doing counseling at all. The issue at stake is whether they are professionally equipped to engage in this kind of work. Oates speaks to this question when he declares,

The pastor, regardless of his training, does not enjoy the privilege of electing whether he will counsel with his people.... His choice is not between counseling and not counseling, but between counseling in a disciplined and skilled way and counseling in an undisciplined and unskilled way.¹⁸

It is obvious that, since the work of the ministry inevitably involves some kind of counseling, the minister should become as competent in this art as his time and opportunities allow. Fortunately, he can choose to involve himself at various levels of complexity. For instance, even in some crisis situations all that may be needed is

¹⁸ Wayne E. Oates (ed.) An Introduction to Pastoral Counseling (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959), p. vi.

someone to help the counselee avoid vicious cycles of problem-aggravating behavior. After all, one of the major goals of crisis counseling is to interrupt debilitating emotional tailspins so that the distraught person can use his own resources to cope more adequately.¹⁹

Sometimes when a person comes to his minister for help, there is little need for more than one counseling session. With concentrated attention a great deal can be accomplished even in only one hour. Oates suggests that in such a situation the minister can hope to accomplish several worthwhile goals. First, he can explore the various alternatives with the counselee. Second, he may be able to give some basic information concerning the problem. If it seems wise, he can refer the person to someone else for special help. He may also be able to provide some spiritual comfort and strength. And finally, he may indicate briefly something of God's purposes in the issues at stake, at least insofar as he understands them.²⁰

So ministers can become involved in counseling with people concerning many different kinds of problems and do so at varying

¹⁹ Clinebell, op. cit., p. 163.

²⁰ Wayne E. Oates, "The Exploratory or Short-Term Interview," in his An Introduction to Pastoral Counseling, p. 111.

levels of complexity and involvement. This holds true for crisis pastoral counseling as well as for counseling with persons who are experiencing relatively routine problems in living. Wilbur E. Worley distinguishes four different levels of crisis counseling.²¹ These levels are given below in the order of increasing complexity. Each succeeding level incorporates the levels preceding it and calls for greater knowledge and competence on the part of the counselor.

The first level is called the level of "environmental manipulation." Helping crisis-ridden persons at this level does not require a great deal of knowledge or training in counseling. In fact, every minister, regardless of his background, should be able to provide some help at this level. The basic thing that is involved is assisting the person in getting the kind of help he needs. Since not all ministers are trained or temperamentally gifted in counseling, some should not try to develop an extensive counseling program anyway. Perhaps the best thing that some ministers can do for a counselee in crisis is to provide him with information that will get him to the best help in the shortest possible time.²²

²¹ Wilbur E. Morley, "Theory of Crisis Intervention," Pastoral Psychology, XXI (April 1970), 17, 18.

²² Milton E. Kirkpatrick, "Mental Hygiene and Religion," Mental Hygiene, XXIV (July 1940), 384.

Next, there is the level of "general support." This is the kind of counseling that is probably used most widely by pastors. It calls for relating with the counselee in ways that are generally supportive. The pastoral counselor listens attentively as the counselee talks about those things that are bothering him. Talking not only relieves the tension of pent up emotions but it may also help the person to clarify his own problem using the counselor as a sounding board. The counselee is affirmed and strengthened by the knowledge that someone understands and really cares what happens to him.

These supportive methods are useful in working with virtually all kinds of people, and persons with weak ego structures may be quite incapable of incorporating counseling that goes much beyond this kind of supportive relationship. So even when the minister is skilled in the use of insight methods of therapy, early in each counseling relationship he will want to ascertain whether the counselee is capable of benefiting by them. He can gain an opinion concerning the basic ego strength of the counselee by noting whether he generally handles everyday responsibilities well and by observing whether or not he seems highly rigid, defensive, and inflexible in his relationship with the counselor.²³ If he is extremely rigid and

²³Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., "Ego Psychology and Pastoral Counseling," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (February 1963), 29.

defensive, it is usually because he does not feel loved and affirmed enough to believe that anyone else could accept that about him which he himself considers unacceptable. The best possible approach to take with such persons is to relate with them in ways that are generally supportive such as those mentioned above.

The third level of crisis counseling is sometimes called the "generic approach." In order to help persons at this level, the minister needs to have a good knowledge both of the nature of crises in general and of the special problem that the counselee is wrestling with in particular. In working with someone who has recently lost a loved one, for example, the minister should know, among other things, that normal bereavement characteristically follows a rather definite pattern that usually includes the following stages: (1) numbness, (2) refusal to accept reality, (3) fantasies that include the memory of selected events, (4) the return of feelings, including overwhelming grief, and (5) transference of emotions to a new object of affection.²⁴ The generic approach to crisis counseling is based, in short, upon the idea that for at least some types of crises there are discernable patterns of normal response.

²⁴Oates, The Christian Pastor, p. 36.

This level of crisis counseling has some limitations, however. For one thing, adequate studies have not been made of all of the major types of problems that frequently trigger crises. Secondly, while the experiences of all human beings may be similar in many respects, there are also many areas of difference.²⁵ Each person is an individual as well as a member of the human race, and the counselor needs to be attentive to each person's own individuality.

The amount of emphasis placed on the counselee's own individuality is the distinctive mark of the fourth level of crisis counseling. In addition to the requirements for the other three approaches, this level, called the "individually tailored approach," demands a knowledge of personality theories, abnormal psychology, and psychodynamics. A high level of training and skill is needed in order to relate the personality dynamics of the individual to his particular crisis experience. While most ministers who apply themselves can learn without too much difficulty to help crisis-ridden persons by counseling at the level of the generic approach, those who wish to do crisis counseling at the fourth level should obtain the special training and supervision that is needed.

²⁵ Glenn E. Whitlock, "The Pastor's Use of Crisis Intervention," Pastoral Psychology, XXI (April 1970), 46.

IV. QUALITIES NEEDED IN THE MINISTER'S COUNSELING RELATIONSHIP

The success or failure of crisis counseling depends in large part on the kind of relationship that is established between the counselor and the counselee. Therefore, some consideration should be given to the qualities that make for a good crisis counseling relationship.

Of supreme value, of course, would be the qualities that are contained in the idea of Christian love. These qualities include such things as a respect for the other person, a desire to know him better, positive feelings toward him, and a willingness to share something of oneself with him. When these elements are present in a counseling relationship, they provide an excellent basis for dealing openly and honestly with critical problems. The minister need not try to fake their presence, however. If they are not real, it is futile and damaging to pretend that they are.

Another quality that is needed in the counseling relationship is a sense of human equality. The minister may know more about theology or psychology than the counselee, but there are other areas where the counselee excels. One may have more prestige or a higher status within the community, but they are both equal with

respect to their personhood. Each can choose to dismiss or to relate with the other.²⁶ And they are both equal before God.

There should also be a vital sense of presence in the relationship. The minister can help to bring this about by endeavoring to be empathically and responsively with the counselee at all times. He may even share selectively of his own inner feelings about their relationship.

It is important that the counseling relationship affirm the great worth of each person involved. To use Martin Buber's word, a sense of Thou is needed in the relationship. Such a relationship encourages each person to do this part so that progress can take place as expeditiously as possible.

V. SOME PROCEDURES FOR CRISIS PASTORAL COUNSELING

Much has been said concerning theoretical factors related to crisis counseling, and a good deal more has been said about the application of this body of knowledge to the vocation of Christian ministry to persons in crises. This has been done in a way that leaves plenty of room for flexibility in the manner in which this

²⁶ Interdenominational Institute for Clergy, The Clergy and People in Crisis (Los Angeles: Mental Health Development Program, May 18, 1965), pp. 18f.

knowledge is applied in specific cases by various pastoral counselors. This emphasis on general principles and methods has been quite intentional, because pastoral counseling is an art to be practiced skillfully rather than a science to be employed technically. Each crisis situation consists of its own unique conglomeration of problems, and each counseling relationship is comprised of persons with unique personalities who should relate with each other in ways that are natural and meaningful to them rather than in ways that are artificially contrived.

This does not mean that nothing more specific can be said about how crisis counseling principles can be applied by ministers in their work with troubled people. What it does mean is that specific suggestions must be used as a guide rather than employed rigidly. Just as the formula must be made to suit the baby and not the baby to suit the formula, so the best approach in counseling depends on the variables mentioned above rather than the other way around.

With this in mind, however, some specific suggestions are in order concerning a possible pattern or procedure that the minister might wish to follow in counseling with someone in crisis. Louis Paul suggests one such pattern. First, he says that the minister should identify for himself the precipitating stress event. What

brought on the crisis? What does the person want from the counselor now? What caused him to seek counseling at this particular time? Next, he should try to perceive what defensive maneuvers the person is employing against his inner responses to the precipitating stress event. Third, the counselor should help the counselee to clarify what he is really feeling. This can usually be done without great difficulty when it is remembered that there are not very many specific emotions. But emotions should be identified precisely and not just alluded to vaguely. The pastoral counselor can help the person to examine and openly experience his emotions by acquainting him with the defenses he is using against recognizing and feeling his true responses to his critical situation. Finally, the minister should discuss the precipitating event with the person and help him to think of possible responses that might not have occurred to him. Hopefully any vicious cycle the person may be involved in will be replaced with a good one of thought, verbalization, sharing, new perceptions, and added coping resources.²⁷

Oates describes a counseling procedure that seems even more useful for the counseling pastor than the pattern described above. Actually, Oates' plan is intended as a procedure for

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 18, 23-26.

conducting a counseling session where no additional interviews are expected to follow. But it can be used very helpfully as a guide for the first interview of a crisis counseling relationship that may include additional sessions. It is set forth in six steps: (1) a discussion of any time limitations that may apply, (2) a "hearing-out phase" that takes up about two-thirds to three-fourths of the available time, (3) an inquiry into details that have not been covered adequately, (4) a discussion of possible alternatives open to the counselee, (5) some guidance, perhaps by summarizing the alternatives, and (6) the proffering of spiritual support. With some adaptation this procedure may even be used in later crisis pastoral counseling interviews.²⁸

One of the most flexible procedural tools for crisis counseling is the so-called ABC system as it is presented by Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. It provides three useful guidelines for helping someone through a crisis. These include: A - achieving contact or psychological connection with the person, B - boiling down the problem to its essentials, and C - challenging the person to cope.²⁹

²⁸Oates, An Introduction to Pastoral Counseling, pp. 111-115.

²⁹Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., in AM240 class at the School of Theology at Claremont on March 10, 1969.

A real advantage of this system is the ease with which it can be learned and used even by the novice. Its simple mnemonic device makes it a facile procedure to remember and follow under nearly all kinds of conditions.

The last procedure to be conceptualized here also involves three stages. These can be compared roughly, though not precisely, with the three steps of Clinebell's system. The first stage is the "expressive phase." During this phase the counselee presents his problem as he sees it. He is encouraged to talk about any aspects of his situation that are bothering him or that seem to be bothering others. This not only gives him a chance to talk about the crisis as a whole and its precipitating event but it also affords him an opportunity to express his feelings about himself and about other persons. Throughout this phase the counseling minister practices the fine art of careful, disciplined listening. He checks his understanding of what the counselee is trying to say by occasionally reflecting, in his own words, his perceptions of what is being said. In short, he uses the methods that are characteristic of crisis counseling at the level of general support.

The second stage of this procedure is called the "explorative phase." Hopefully by this time the minister has been able to establish a good sense of rapport with the troubled person.

Questions can now be asked to fill in gaps in the minister's knowledge of the person, others in his social and familial milieu, and the important details of the present problem. Then the minister and the counselee can explore various ways of coping with the situation. Things that have already been tried can be discussed and their effectiveness or lack of it evaluated. The minister should encourage the counselee to try to think of new alternative kinds of action that can be taken. Acting as a resource person, the minister may provide vitally-useful information concerning the problem and, in some instances, the general personality dynamics of the counselee. The pastoral counselor may even express his own ideas concerning desirable courses of action, or he may give his opinion as to what steps might be taken first.

The third stage of this approach is called the "decisive phase." Since every crisis demands some kind of judgment or decision, this is an essential part of the crisis pastoral counseling procedure. During this phase the minister calls upon the counselee to make a decision concerning a plan of action for changing his circumstances and/or himself so that his crisis can be resolved as expeditiously as possible. Neither the counselor nor the counselee can be absolutely sure as to what specific steps will ultimately prove most beneficial. But they must begin to act using what knowledge

and understanding they have. In the words of the ancient Chinese sage, "the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

The phases of this particular procedure are designated by words that allow for a great deal of versatility. In fact, the above description only gives some indication of the many kinds of things that can be done at each stage. So there is built-in flexibility within this procedural schema. Therefore, it can be used in a variety of ways and with many different types of problems. It also allows for enough variation to accommodate the factor of individuality in nearly every counseling relationship. Moreover, this procedure can be used as a guide in structuring not only the first crisis counseling session but subsequent sessions as well. Or, it can be discarded at any time in favor of some other approach.

Whatever counseling procedure the minister may choose to follow, his paramount concern should always be the healing and growth of the troubled person. Fortunately, he is not alone in this concern. There are tremendous resources within the Christian Church that can be mobilized toward realizing this objective. And these resources include other persons who also care.

CHAPTER V

PASTORAL CARE THROUGH CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

The Church is the proper context for the ministry of pastoral counseling. Indeed, one may even say that the Church and pastoral counseling are inseparable.¹ To the extent that the pastoral counselor relinquishes, discards, or ignores this relationship, he ceases to be a pastoral counselor, even though he may continue to do effective counseling and perhaps even to help people with so-called existential-philosophical problems.

In his work as a pastoral counselor, the minister offers himself as a fellow human being who cares for the person in need. But he is usually seen as a servant of God as well, representing both God's claim upon men and his offer of grace and help in the time of need. The minister is also a representative of the Church, and specifically he represents in most cases some particular church. The counselee's conception of the Church may affect his relationship

¹Here the word "Church" is used in a broad sense to refer to the Church Universal. That the Church and pastoral counseling are inseparable does not mean that pastoral counseling must be related necessarily to a church or a group of churches, though many of its special resources do, in fact, depend on such a relationship.

with the minister; and reciprocally, his relationship with the minister may alter his conception of the Church. Hopefully he senses real concern on the part of the minister and recognizes this as representative of the pastoral concern of the larger body of Christians that the minister represents.

The minister himself should remember that the amount of time he can spend with any one individual is limited. So he should avoid giving the impression that he is the one source of help within the church. Instead, he should seek to cultivate a kind of community wherein persons can experience the strength of one another's understanding and love. In short, the entire church should participate in the ministry of pastoral care. This is its privilege and responsibility as a part of that larger Church which includes all persons who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and who are truly united to him.

I. THE CHURCH AS CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

If the ministry of pastoral care belongs to a church by reason of its participation in the Church, it is important to understand the nature of the Church and its purpose for being. It is possible to move toward such an understanding by considering four questions concerning the Church: (1) What is its source? (2) Of

what does it consist? (3) What is its form? and (4) What is its purpose?

First, what is the Church's source? The Christian's answer can only be that God is the source of the Church. It is only through the gift of God's grace that men are able to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and become truly united to him. So it is God who calls the Church into being and creates it by his gracious action. Of course, he has chosen to do this by acting in Jesus Christ, in the first place, and thereafter by that action of the Holy Spirit upon persons whereby they become a part of the Christian community of faith.

If God is ultimately the source of the Church's being, of what does the Church consist? It is comprised of all persons who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and who are truly united to him. As Karl Barth suggests, the Church is the company of the faithful who have responded to God's faithfulness with faithfulness toward God.² This implies neither perfect obedience nor freedom from error. To condemn persons within the Church because of imperfect living is to miss the point altogether. This community is made up of those who, acknowledging their own sin, have come to trust in the

²Karl Barth, The Faith of the Church (London: Collins, 1958), p. 115.

reliability of the perfect love of God. So when sin is observed within the Christian community, it should not come as a surprise, on the one hand, nor should it be dismissed lightly, on the other. Instead, it should serve as a clear warning against personal or community self-righteousness and as a vivid reminder that all must live by faith in the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.³

Third, what is the Church's form? The Church is a community. It is a community of persons under God who have a relationship with one another in which each is free and yet all are mutually supportive members of the same body. The New Testament speaks of this community as one body in Christ or the body of which Christ is the head.⁴ In this relational organism each member contributes his part to the well-being of the entire body by functioning in his own unique way according to his own talents and abilities. Yet each member is related intimately to all other members since all share in the common life of the body as a whole.

To speak of the Church as Christian community implies that no one within the Church is sufficient unto himself alone. In the words of Joan Whitney, "No man is an island." Each needs

³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), p. 28.

⁴Cf. Rom. 12:4 and Col. 1:18.

others within the community. For one thing, each needs someone to declare to him the Christian message of justification by faith through grace alone and then to demonstrate to him that he is accepted on this basis.⁵ One of the goals of Christian community is to make this message vivid and meaningful to all.

In order for Christian community to be real, persons must be released from the bondage of excessive self-centeredness so that they can give of themselves in love to God and to one another. This kind of liberation from bondage to oneself comes as a person realizes that God loves him even when he seems quite unlovable to himself. When a person grasps this reality, he is able to relax some of his defenses and to reach out to God and to other persons with love toward them. This helps to develop and to perpetuate a kind of community life that fosters spiritual and psychosocial growth and overcomes the emotional starvation that results from alienation.

If the Church can be understood best by the concept of Christian community, then a church, as part of that larger community, can itself be viewed helpfully under the motif of Christian community. In fact, as was indicated in chapter one, a church is an

⁵ Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 23.

organized community of persons who profess to be united to Christ. Lest it become merely a cliquish sect, however, a church must understand itself as part of the one Universal Christian Church. At the same time, it should not hesitate to find its own identity within that larger context and should, by all means, seek to develop concretely the life of Christian community that is the ideal of the Church Universal. After all, some particular church is the locus in which the community life must be lived. So disciplined commitment to a particular community of faith is very important.⁶ As Barth points out, "to believe the Church is first to belong to one's church, whatever it may be, and within it to confess the Church Universal.... Concretely to believe the Church is to accept concretely to live within a church."⁷

It is within the local church fellowship that persons can come to know and care for one another in a way that makes genuine Christian community possible as a living and vital experience. At the same time, since true Christian community implies freedom within a group relationship, the local church may often fall short of

⁶ Edward E. Thornton, Theology and Pastoral Counseling (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 118.

⁷ Barth, op. cit., p. 125.

this kind of community life. It may demand conformity at the expense of freedom. When this happens, someone must stand between the group and the individual and provide guidance in order that true Christian community might be restored. This task often falls to the minister. He must seek to be understanding toward the individual, on the one hand, and to maintain the fellowship of the group on the other. The church should be reminded that responsibility toward the group requires freedom for the individual. Otherwise, responsibility is not responsibility at all, but mere conformity. Likewise, the individual may need to be reminded of his obligation to help meet the needs of the group. When the individual learns to express his own individuality in a way that does not disregard the needs of the group and when the group learns to appreciate and value individual differences, then the local church can become a concrete and vigorous expression of the kind of Christian community that is the ideal of the Church Universal.

Finally, what is the purpose of the Church? The purpose of the Church is to promote and to help effect among men an increase in the love of God and neighbor. It seeks to do this through the proclamation of the Gospel, i.e., the good news that because of God's love for men he took upon himself the form of man in Jesus Christ in order that he might reconcile men unto himself. The central theme

of the Gospel is God's love for men. The purpose of the Church is to make this love so real to persons that they respond naturally to it with increasing love toward God and toward one another.

The Church's purpose finds its fulfillment through the ministry of the local church; each Christian community exists to help persons to grow in their love of God and neighbor. This is the reason why a church engages in the proclamation of the Gospel. But proclamation is not always effective because emotional blocks sometimes hinder people from receiving and applying the truths of the Gospel. Consequently, the church must also provide the kind of pastoral care that helps people with their personal problems. In this way, it expresses its concern for persons even as it enables them to experience the love of God and through that experience to come to love God and others.

The minister who engages in helping persons in crises is involved in this kind of pastoral care. But the work of the minister alone is not enough. The entire Christian community must become involved in the ministry of pastoral care. This can be done in a way that is especially meaningful and helpful to persons in need by the development of the church's group life.

Each church should provide a network of various kinds of groups designed to meet the many kinds of needs that arise within

such a community. Because groups may sometimes function solely to perpetuate themselves, occasionally each group within a church should make a self-study to discover its true purpose for existence, its weaknesses and strengths, its goals, and how it might best fulfill the purpose for which it exists. Since a church can become revitalized through the development of a meaningful network of dynamic groups, such a study of its group life may reveal (1) how the groups can be made more useful in building healthy interpersonal relationships, (2) whether the groups are meeting important needs, and (3) what new groups need to be formed to fill gaps in the Church's life as a healing-redemptive fellowship.

Just as each individual has his own unique personality and his own special needs, so each church has its own particular characteristics and needs. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize on how the group life in a church should be structured. Each individual church must discover what is best for it and then be flexible enough to change as the needs of those it serves change.

One general rule, however, can be suggested as a guide: each church should evaluate itself with a view toward providing a variety of groups so that the many different needs within its community can be met. These might include task-centered groups, study groups, person-centered growth groups, and therapy groups.

Though task-centered and study groups serve very useful functions, a great opportunity for improving the pastoral care ministry of most churches lies in utilizing relationships within these groups to foster human growth and in developing other groups whose primary purpose is the healing and growth of persons. For instance, opportunities should be provided for persons to participate in growth groups that are geared to helping relatively healthy persons to greater Christian maturity. These growth groups are usually less intense and deal with material that is less personal and threatening than therapy groups. Therefore, they can be led by persons who have less training than is required for regular therapy groups.

A church should not attempt to provide therapy groups unless well-trained leadership is available. But when there is competent leadership, therapy groups can make a valuable contribution to the pastoral care of persons who are going through various kinds of crises. For example, a well-trained minister may choose to meet privately with someone in crisis for two or three sessions and then get the person involved in a growth or therapy group where he can continue to get the help that he may need. In this way the minister and the church join together in providing for the pastoral care of persons in need.

Regardless of what the structure of the group life of a church may be, however, nothing can take the place of genuine Christian community. Where this is present, healing and growth take place; where it is not present, no amount of organization can do the job. When a church becomes a Christian community in reality, and not in name only, it becomes a true healing and redemptive fellowship--a fellowship perhaps most ideally characterized by the concept of koinonia.⁸

II. THE IDEAL OF KOINONIA

Koinonia is a Greek word that is very rich in meaning. The Revised Standard Version of the New Testament uses five or six different English words to translate the variety of nuances connoted by this one Greek word. The word koinonia carries with it the idea of deep and genuine fellowship or of sharing with someone in something. In secular Greek culture koinonia was used to refer to an especially close life partnership. In this sense marriage is a koinonia relationship because marriage at its best symbolizes the closest, most enduring, and most comprehensive form of human fellowship.

⁸Koinonia is a Greek word transliterated into English.

The Greeks also spoke of koinonia with the gods. The people of Israel, however, did not use this term to refer to the relationship between God and man,⁹ probably because of their emphasis on the awesomeness of God. Man's relationship to him is seen by them primarily as one of dependence rather than one of fellowship and partnership.

In the New Testament the word koinonia is used with several different shades of meaning. As it is used by Paul, it usually has definite religious content. He speaks of the participation (koinonia) of the believer in Christ and of mutual fellowship (koinonia) among believers.¹⁰ The koinonia relationship among Christian believers derives naturally from the koinonia (or fellowship) of each believer with Christ.

Applying this idea to the life of a church today, one could say that koinonia is possible for people who come together from all walks of life to the extent that they share meaningfully in some significant central focus of concern. Their mutual concern may be

⁹ Friedrich Hauck, "*Kοινωνία*" in Gerhard Kittel (ed.) Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), III, 801.

¹⁰ Ibid., III, 804.

the brotherhood of men under God, a deep commitment of their lives in Christian faith, or a group relationship of openness, honesty, trust, acceptance, and love. Or they may share some other common concern. Whatever the basis of their koinonia relationship, an awareness of a common relatedness to God can add depth to their mutual bond of fellowship.

Though koinonia means fellowship, this is not merely a feeling of togetherness. It is a deep sense of relatedness. The New Testament uses the term koinonia in connection with the divine-human relationship. "Our fellowship (koinonia) is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."¹¹ The koinonia of the Christian brotherhood grows out of this divine koinonia: "We have fellowship (koinonia) with one another."¹² The ideas of communion and participation are also inherent in the concept of koinonia. Paul uses the term to express these ideas in his discussion of the meaning of the Lord's Supper.¹³ Koinonia also means sharing. It is used in both the Pauline and Petrine epistles in connection with sharing in

¹¹1 John 1:3.

¹²1 John 1:7.

¹³1 Cor. 10:16.

Christ's sufferings.¹⁴ Thus a koinonia relationship may involve sharing in another person's troubles and sufferings, as well as in their joys and satisfactions. This is what happens in a good counseling relationship. The person who is expressing his feelings of hurt or who is engaged in some other struggle experiences fellow human beings (counselor and/or group members) participating with him in his struggle or sharing to some extent in his deep feelings of pain.

Moreover, koinonia means partnership. All true Christians are thought of as partners in the household of faith. They partake of the same grace and together engage themselves as partners in Christian service. Furthermore, they enter into a partnership of giving and receiving.¹⁵ This aspect of koinonia is a part of the very essence of good pastoral counseling. The counselor does not only give any more than the counselee only receives. Both give and both receive. It is a serious mistake for the counselor to assume that he only gives, and it is sad indeed when he is not open to receive the treasures that the counselee brings to their mutual relationship.

¹⁴ Bela Vassady, "Are We Koinonia-conscious?", Theology and Life, VIII (Winter 1965), 247.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Even though the pastoral counselor comes to the counseling situation as a representative of God and the Church, he must be ever aware that in ministering to the needy he ministers unto the Christ and that in the needy he meets the Christ who ministers to him. So koinonia may also mean contribution. But since one can give only what he has already received, the practice of koinonia as contribution cannot be disassociated from the experiences of fellowship, communion, participation, sharing, and partnership. All of these aspects are interrelated, and all are a part of the concept of koinonia.

Certain other characteristics seem to be basic to the nature of this concept as well. Among them are the following:

1. Koinonia is active relationship at a deep level. It is not stagnant, but vital and alive.
2. Koinonia is spontaneous. It cannot be contrived, and participation must be voluntary.
3. Koinonia is self-transcending.¹⁶ It is not ingrown introspection. Instead it balances love for "I" with love for "Thou." A koinonia relationship involves a sharing of the self and a reaching out to others.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 248, 249.

4. Koinonia is robust. It is not just a warm feeling. It is person-to-person involvement which may sometimes include anger and vigorous confrontation.

In light of the many positive qualities of koinonia, one might well ask whether people can do anything to bring about such a relationship. Actually it seems that human beings have a natural thrust toward relatedness. So one could say that koinonia is a potentiality within the very nature of man, even when it is not actualized. But it is questionable whether the experience of koinonia as such is a proper goal toward which to strive directly. Rather, it would seem that this experience emerges when persons involve themselves with one another in caring relationships, express feelings openly, listen carefully to what others try to say, and act with others toward the fulfillment of common goals. Under such conditions koinonia is likely to spring forth naturally. Perhaps it could be said that koinonia can be understood in two ways. First, it can be seen as a theological reality. This is the reality of partnership in a common fellowship of faith or concern. In this sense, when two Christian persons meet as fellow members of the Christian Church, koinonia is present as a theological reality, and as such it does not depend upon emotions or feelings. Second, koinonia can be seen as a human experience. This experience may

be illustrated by what happens on those occasions in group counseling when persons sense their "groupness" or by what is experienced in one-to-one counseling when the participants grasp some deep insight together or when one recognizes that he is accepted by the other and by God.

When a church is faithful to its raison d'être, koinonia becomes a revitalizing experience to many persons within its fellowship. As a true Christian community, with all that that term implies, its full resources are brought to bear upon human needs. Moreover, the minister and the congregation become one in their pastoral concern and in their participation in the actualization of a truly redemptive, healing, and growth-producing community.

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